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ROBERT SIMPSON, EDITOR

Volume X Number 5

CONTENTS

COVER DESIGN.....FRED. T. EVERETT
AROUND THE CORNER.....THE EDITOR 514
THE FACE.....WILL SCOTT 515
Complete Novelette
PHILADELPHIA MAKES A BET.....WILLARD W. SMITH 529
A Short Story
DEAD MEN MAKE NO MUSIC.....EDWINA LEVIN MACDONALD 542
Five Part Story—Part I
EXCALIBUR THE ENCHANTED SWORD.....FRED. T. EVERETT 573
The Legend of the Cover Design
THE LADY OF THE TURQUOISE.....JULIA M. LIPPMAN 574
A Short Story
BLOWHARD.....CHARLES FRANCIS COE 586
A Short Story
RED PAINT.....MADELEINE SHARPS BUCHANAN 596
Three Part Story—Conclusion
THE JOKE ON LUMMICK.....WALLACE M. SLOANE 614
A Short Story
LIGEIA.....RICHARD KEITH 620
A Short Story
DOLLY BLAW.....WILLIAM MERRIAM ROUSE 626
Complete Novelette

MISCELLANEOUS

SUNK BY THE SPIDER..... 528

Subscription Price: In United States and Possessions $3.00 per year; single copy 25 cents. Canada $3.50 per year; foreign $4.00.

Published monthly by The Priscilla Company, publication office 52 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York City. Entered as second-class matter December 24, 1925, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Trade Mark Registered.

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Manuscripts must be accompanied by sufficient postage for return. The publishers disclaim all responsibility for loss of unsolicited manuscripts. Address all communications to Robert Simpson, Editor, 52 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York City.

Around the Corner

SOME one has said that drama is architecture in motion. This means that a play, on a par with the Woolworth Building, is an architectural entity, and must be built right and upon a sound foundation if it expects to stand.

And what applies to the stage applies to the whole field of fiction; and most particularly to the kind of fiction that employs mystery and suspense as its principal mediums for producing the desired results.

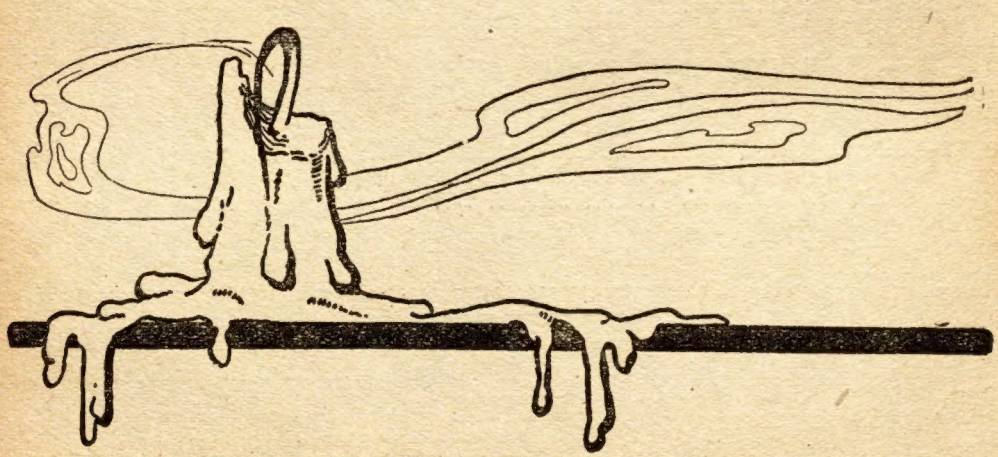
Possibly no kind of story is more in need of architectural technique than a really good mystery story. And by a really good mystery story is meant the kind of story that, in addition to its quota of action and suspense, also has character and style and all-around humanness.

Stories of this sort are not written by pseudo-essayists posing as novelists. They are not written by the people who write a far-too-great proportion of our—to use a most appropriate Scotch word—blethering best sellers.

They are written by men and women who, by long and tedious application, have learned the architecture of story-making just as the architect has learned how to construct a thing of stone and iron so that its foundations, reaching sometimes far down into the bowels of the earth, will vibrate in perfect harmony with the roof which may reach half a mile into the heavens.

The stories appearing in this magazine are of the sort that are built right. And though every story will not always appeal to every reader in quite the same way, it is the belief of the editors that most of these stories will satisfy most of the people most of the time.

THE EDITOR.



The Face

By WILL SCOTT

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

ALL THIS reaching for the moon—the way the dustman strives to earn a throne, the way the emperor envies the dustman—it leads to queer things. Some moons are quite near; dim little things more like the lamps down the edge of a street.

Once there was a man who asked no more of what life there remained to him than a certain cottage on a certain moor in Devon, there to live it out with his wife and three nippers. He got a piece of paper and made calculations. On seventy-five a year—say a thousand pounds—he could manage the rest of his life.

But though he worked hard and served many masters well, his fortieth birthday found him with no more than ninety pounds in the bank. The thing seemed hopeless.

He tore up his piece of paper and ceased to calculate. All he could see for himself was to stagger on for a few more years and then to die, his ambition dying with him, neither of them having come to anything.

And then one evening, quite by accident, he got an idea: he resigned from the latest of his futile posts, withdrew the ninety from the bank and set out to grab his modest moon from the sky by a means so novel that always he will be accounted an artist by the few that know his story.

Just a tiny idea it was at first. But you must have ideas. Even when your ambition is eight-cylinder it won't go alone. Ideas are the gas.

CONSIDER the case of Frank Mayo. Here was a man with so many ideas that (to continue the metaphor) his ambition touched ninety. His speed was so fierce that his head felt tired and he had to see a doctor.

The doctor looked grave and ordered him into bottom gear for three months, threatening no end of dismal

things if he kept up the pace. He had been keeping up the pace, the doctor said, too long.

Mayo was managing editor of an influential group of light magazines and humorous weeklies. It was a grim business, and no wonder Frank had not been known to smile for years.

Behind him toiled a mob of equally grave and laughless men—assistant-editors, art-editors, sub-editors, artists, writers, engravers, printers, printers' boys and what-not. None had ever been known to smile.

Light magazines are no light task. Making jokes is no joke.

Once a month, or once a week, the mighty efforts of this army of morosians climbed up a crescendo and caused a climax. Unlaughing warehousemen heaved bundles into vans and off to stations; unlaughing porters packed them into trains; and, at some remote destination, unlaughing retailers unpacked the wares and spread them on shabby news-stands or in shabby windows.

After which, some fellow with a mustache and a cheap hat, or some girl off a bus, would make a purchase, open a tuppenny sheet and burst into laughter; the very first laugh in all this mirthless business.

And so, weekly, Frank Mayo relaxed for a moment, satisfied until he came to start again. But even then he didn't smile.

Now all this solemn affair of controlling his tremendous army for the purpose of raising that distant provincial titter had its effect on Frank Mayo's character. He was so keyed-up to catch that far-away laugh that he developed a kind of new sense.

He was impressionable in a superway, always vaguely expectant. Little things, that another man would have passed unnoticed, got through his armor.

Years before the Face came into his life he was ready, worked-up to be obsessed. It needed only some little spark to cause the fire.

FRANK MAYO had started from nowhere, climbed with his teeth set, and now at thirty-five was getting his two thousand pounds a year and earning every penny of it.

His intimacy with the other end of the ladder had given him the common touch and kept him unspoilt. Printer and peer felt at ease in his presence, and you'd find him in an A. B. C. teashop as often as you'd find him in the Carlton.

It is interesting to reflect that a different Frank Mayo, forgetful of the past, renouncing teashop for ever with his first editorship, would not have run the risk of that extraordinary obsession. If Mayo had gone to the Carlton that night it must have happened to someone else, or not happened at all.

But he went to the teashop, because it was just down the road and he was feeling too much on edge to trouble about dressing. He sat wearily in his favorite corner, pressed his temples and stroked his eyes, agreed with what the doctor had said, decided he was all in, opened his newspaper and settled down to the game of patience that is always best played in these places.

And when after the usual lapse of time food was placed before him, he had read most of the news twice and even attempted the free puzzle on the back of the menu. He saw nothing funny in being kept waiting. Years devoted to humorous papers had killed his sense of humor.

He stirred his coffee without interest and hated the food on the plates. He made no attempt to begin. He took off his eyeglasses once more, pressed his eyes, laid the glasses on the table and tried to re-

member what orders for tomorrow he had given Reynolds.

"I've got to get out of London pretty soon," he told himself. "Got to get away. I feel worth about eightpence. Wrong time of the year for a holiday. South of France, maybe. Florida . . ."

He had a feeling of uneasiness beyond the ordinary, for which there appeared to be no explanation, unless the threatened breakdown was nearer than he thought.

He felt foolishly shy. His hands were shaking. After a while he felt angry with himself for the feeling, and almost savagely he attacked his meal.

This did not dispel the atmosphere, though it drove off some of the subtlety. Reducing it to a clear thought, Mayo grabbed his glasses, slipped them on and tried to discover who was watching him.

IT WAS a fellow right across the room, a man half hidden by the banks of cigaret smoke, with his elbows on the table and his chin on cupped hands, staring at Mayo with a fixed, set stare.

But that wasn't all. To be so systematically stared at by any man would have been sufficiently embarrassing to one in Mayo's present condition of health; but, to cap the situation, this starer was the ugliest man that Frank had ever seen.

He was not ugly in a merely unbeautiful way; he was revolting, catastrophic, frightful. He was intensely unpleasant to look at, and it wasn't very long before Mayo's eyes were dropped.

Now it is an established fact that ugliness, be it sublime, can scorn the rivalry of beauty on this our poor, imperfect earth. You may look at a beautiful woman for a minute or two, but you will mingle with a crowd for hours on the slim chance of getting near enough to the accident to have a good view of the remains before the ambulance men arrive. The world that let Vermeer and his masterpieces rot in a humble Dutch garret gilded the edges of the bearded lady's securities.

Therefore it was not very long before Frank Mayo was taking another peep. Frightful the Face might be, but it was fascinating.

He looked up swiftly, on the chance of taking the other unawares; but it was no use. The same set, unwavering stare met his nervous glance—fixed and fearful, seemingly straight into the very depths of his soul.

Mayo could not say that the man was bad-looking in the strict sense; that is, he did not seem evil, a man of whom no other man could ever make a friend. But his ugliness was crushing. And his stare—stare—stare was akin to an inquisition.

Mayo flushed, fumbled with his tie and looked away. For a brief moment he examined a wall advertisement for malted milk; then he looked back. He had to.

The same appalling stare met him once more. He dropped his eyes and poked about with his knife.

"My God!" he muttered.

Foolishly he felt ashamed, as if he himself had been caught staring. An alcove turned out of the corner in which he was sitting and he took up cup and plate and walked away a few tables into this alcove—went into hiding against the face.

"A weak thing to do," he confessed to himself, "but that chap's face was a holy terror. I couldn't have stood it any longer."

He felt easier for a time; then he experienced the same baffled, watched sensation coming on again. His head jerked up quickly. Surely the fellow with the Face had not had the impertinence to move nearer?

But the fellow with the Face had had no need to. Back in the 'nineties, the designer of the teashop had gone pretty well mad with mirrors. Mirrors to the right caught and held the reflections of the mirrors to the left and the mirrors behind.

It was a nightmare in glass. Where one ugly man had looked at Frank Mayo before, no less than a score now kept that pitiless stare directed on him. With an impolite exclamation he snatched up hat and bill and strode down the room.

In front of the table where sat the man with the Face he stopped, the hand that held the bill shaking like a leaf.

"What the devil do you mean by it?" he demanded.

And men and women all around stopped eating to watch and listen. A hundred eyes were now on Mayo. Before it had been only two. He flushed crimson.

"I beg your pardon?" said the man with the Face; and it was the meekest, most inoffensive voice in the world.

"Staring at me!" Mayo snapped. He was as rigid as a statue with self-consciousness.

"I'm sorry," said the man with the voice; but he did not stop staring.

"I have a dog that's better bred than you!" Mayo flared, strumming nervously on the edge of the table.

A waitress came to a bewildered standstill, and men were lolling over the backs of chairs, with hands dangling and cigarets tilted, all eagerly listening. Someone going out became interested and ceased to go out.

"I have already apologized," said the man with the Face.

At which Frank Mayo flushed a yet deeper hue. Plainly in the opinion of interested observers he was in the wrong.

There was only one thing for it. He turned abruptly, collided with the waitress, apologized, stumbled to the cash desk and thumped his bill and money on the shelf.

There were spots of rain on the pavement and Frank stood to button his coat and turn up his collar and light a cigaret before making up his mind whether to go home or return to the office.

And before he could make up his mind he heard swing doors open and shut behind him, and when he looked back there was the man with the Face standing beneath a street lamp, his eyes boring two tiny tunnels right through the managing editor's body.

"Damn!" muttered Mayo, and with temples throbbing and fist clenched he strode away at top speed and did not slow down until the great doors of the office building had slammed between them. Even then he took the steps to the second floor three at a time.

REEVES, a sub, was fumbling with a package on the desk when he stamped into his private office. Reeves looked around, saw who it was and took a drawing out of the package.

"Didn't expect you back tonight," he said.

"No," said Mayo shortly, flicking back the lid of an ink-well.

"This drawing of Tate's," said Reeves, holding it out.

"What?" Mayo snatched at the drawing and propped it up on the desk, frowning at it the while he relighted his smoke. Reeves took note of the shaking hand and the strained look behind Mayo's glasses.

"You saw the doctor?" he asked.

"Of course I saw the doctor!" Mayo exclaimed testily.

And then wearily: "I'm frayed down to the last shred. He's going to send me away to some place."

Meeting Reeves' eye, he added

hastily: "I mean Mentone, or possibly Florida, or somewhere. I've been working too hard too long. I'll be as fit as a fiddle in a month. Yes, all right. Pass this drawing through. Send Tate a check."

"You told me to send it back," Reeves said casually. "You said it was no good. I was going to ask if it should go back tonight."

"What!

Mayo's chair swung round threateningly and he strummed along the edge of his desk as far as the blotting pad and back.

"If I told you to send it back, why the devil come worrying me about it any longer? Do as I tell you!"

"Send it back or send the check?" asked Reeves blandly.

"Oh, damn! Give me the thing!" Mayo dragged the drawing forward and glared at it bitterly. "Leave it with me. I'll attend to this myself—tomorrow."

He tossed the sketch aside and took off his glasses and stroked his eyes. Stroking his eyes was becoming a habit. He made a mental note to stop the habit immediately, then looked up and found Reeves still there.

"Anything else you want?" he asked.

"I was going to ask if there's anything wrong," said Reeves. "When you came in you looked as if you'd been seeing something that wasn't there."

"It was there all right!" said Frank. "Lord! A man with a Face!"

"Yet to see one without one," put in Reeves.

"There are faces *and* faces," observed Mayo. "Faces *and* faces . . .

"I'm afraid I made a bit of a fool of myself. It was in a teashop. There was a scene, and I upset a tray. Things like that get me on edge these days. I'm too nervous for anything. But he would keep on staring, you understand? Staring! Then he followed me into the street."

"Who was he?"

"How should I know?" Mayo winced. "I never set eyes on him before."

"Then why did he do it?"

"Why? Heaven knows! He had no reason."

"He must have had a reason," Reeves persisted.

"I tell you he hadn't," Mayo said irritably. "He was some fool—probably insane. Gad! I'd have smashed his ugly face uglier if he'd kept on. All right. Run along, now. I'll see to this drawing in the morning."

AT NINE o'clock, the rest of the staff having departed, Mayo stuffed a bundle of MSs. into his attache case, switched off the light and left the building to the cleaners. Across the road, under a lamp, the man with the Face was standing—staring.

Mayo met his steady gaze, stood for a moment peering at him through his glasses, but the other fellow did not waver. Frank turned down the street toward the Underground, an echoing slur of feet behind as he set off.

Swearing under his breath, he swung around and crossed the road. He drew up, shaking with passion before this extraordinary shadow.

"I give you one minute," he said, "in which to disappear."

The man with the Face considered the threat with judicial gravity, then spoke in soft tones:

"I am sorry, sir, but this is a public thoroughfare. I have quite as much right here as you. If I do not molest you, you can do nothing about it. Take legal advice!"

"You insolent swine!" cried Mayo. "I'll break every bone in your damned body!"

"In which case I would be compelled to prosecute for assault."

Mayo changed his attache case to his other hand.

"Look here, now. Why on earth do you follow me like this and stare at me? I don't know you. There's no sense in it."

The man with the Face offered no reply. He did not speak at all. He merely stared.

"Do you hear me?"

Still no reply. And the man's ugliness was so enormous that after a minute Mayo no longer could continue to look at him at such short range. He had to look away, and then what slight grip of the other he might have hoped to gain was gone for ever.

He realized with a shock that the man with the face was beating him, and that his great weapon was this same powerful ugliness. The managing editor began to tingle with a new sensation.

Unless he did something he would very soon be entirely dominated. And the astounding thing about it was that it was not hypnotism or superior will or anything like that; it was just ugliness.

He might call a policeman? And make a fool of himself . . .

Beside himself with high temper, he strode away, but all the time he knew he was being followed and that the terrible eyes set in that ghastly face were keenly watching him every inch of the way. At the Underground he took a ticket to Golders Green. The man with the Face did the same.

They sat opposite to each other in the train. And though Mayo used a newspaper as a screen, every five minutes or so he was compelled to peep round and see if the eyes were still there. They were. He realized that by peeping he was admitting weakness. Behind his paper he swore afresh.

THE MAYOS lived at North End, up the hill. Frank took a taxi from the station, and not once looked back at the man with the Face. He ran up the steps of his house and slammed the door behind him in an excess of fury.

His wife was coming downstairs. Without precisely noticing her he was vaguely aware of her rich black hair and her silver dress. He thrust his way into his study and dejectedly sat before the fire. She followed him in.

"Good evening, dear," he said, plucking off his glasses and stroking his eyes.

She sat at his feet on a little stool and when she took his hand in hers it was still at last; still, but very cold.

"Now tell me," she said.

Mayo blinked at this restful woman in silver. Always he had brought his troubles to her. She was the calm after all his storms, storms however trivial.

He had wooed her in the evenings, and always she reminded him of the close of day, when the hot press of events is over. She had a fund of common sense such as he had never found in other women. She had an air of implying that things would be all right by tomorrow.

But now for once he hesitated. He was not sure that his present dilemma called for common sense. He could visualize her placid smile when he told her about the man with the Face.

She'd put it down to nerves, no doubt, and phone the police, or give him a glass of milk. Possibly she would harbor the notion that temporarily he was going mad. Possibly he was . . .

Aloud he said: "Oh, it's just the

usual, my dear. The doctor talked of Mentone or some place like that, but of course Mentone's out of the question. I phoned Cobb today, and he's got us a little bungalow down at Mortimer Beach. I shall follow you down, week-end.

"The old boy was quite nice about it. They'll manage to carry on during my absence. Somehow . . . I'll be able to come up, odd days, after the first week, I expect."

"We'll see about that," said Freda Mayo. "You're under somebody else's orders for once in your life, and you've got to obey them. I'll ask Stevens to prepare supper. You must be in bed by half-past ten."

She patted his hand, kissed his brow and went to the door. Tonight more than ever she was trying to be the calm after his storm.

He stared into the fire and did not know that her hand was trembling on the knob. Governed as she was by common sense, she would be more interested in bungalows than obsessions. He tried to be fair to her.

"Cobb says it's the best bungalow in Mortimer Beach. We'll have a great time there. Finest air in the world, Cobb says. Children's paradise."

"It's damned odd," he thought when the door had closed on Freda. "There's no reason for it—I never saw the chap before. Most likely he's mad—had the nerves some time and gone mad. His face makes me sick!"

HE DID not sleep well that night. A clanging bell aroused him on one occasion and he got out of bed and crept to the window and peeped through the curtain. The street was empty, a long ribbon of moonlight, blue and desolate.

He dropped the curtain and turned to find his wife watching him.

"Frank! What are you doing there? What is the matter? Why are you out of bed?"

He was cornered now, and he had to face the music.

"I was looking to see if a man was there," he said lamely.

"A man?"

"A man with a horrible face. He's been following me."

Freda slipped out of bed and hurried to the window. She looked down at the empty street.

"There's nobody there," she said.

"No. Not now. He followed me home. He followed me through the streets. He has a terrible face, like a man who's been in an accident."

She led him back to bed and said no more until he was between the sheets. Then she began to question him.

"Who is this man?"

"I don't know, dear—really I don't."

"Then why did he follow you?"

"Heaven knows! He can't have a reason."

"Perhaps he thinks he has?"

He frowned at what he thought she was thinking. As she uncorked his medicine bottle he suddenly sat up and cried:

"I tell you there was a man! You don't believe me!"

"Of course I believe you, darling," said Freda. "Why not? There was a man. Probably drunk. Now drink this and try to sleep. You know what the doctor said."

HE pretended to sleep, so that his wife would cease to trouble and sleep. But he was thinking all the time. He was not alarmed. What was there to be alarmed about? But he was mentally disturbed when he was not in a fit state to stand mental disturbance.

His daily work, the endless strain of it, the everlasting beginning again, had made of him fertile

ground for staring eyes, set in a repulsive face. Possibly it was a fantastic joke. But it was annoying. He was annoyed, irritated.

So irritated that he could have smashed the staring man into little pieces—only that way lay the law. It was exasperating to have to admit that all along the staring man was in the right.

The thought of the fellow's face made him shudder. He wondered if he would come back in the night, if perhaps he were even at this moment outside the house, watching.

Mayo opened his eyes and looked across at his wife's bed. Her open eyes met his and she rose instantly. She went to the window.

"There's nobody there," she announced; and she came and bent over him. "Now go to sleep or I must be cross."

"Good-night, dear," he said.

And after a pause she replied in a noncommittal way that disturbed him considerably: "Good-night."

"Suspects I'm going mad, I suppose," he thought. "Suspects something."

IN the morning Freda studiously avoided all reference to the man with the Face. If she had merely pretended to believe in the fellow's existence, he would have been soothed to some extent; but she kept off the subject. All she would talk about was the bungalow at Mortimer Beach and the best trains to take.

Without being clear as to the reason, he left the house in a blazing temper that made his temples thump and nearly deprived him of sight. His nerves were so tight he felt they would snap.

On the way to the station he picked up the man with the Face once more. Baffled, not able to think it out clearly, he strode on without looking back. He and the man with the Face rode to town in the same carriage, but the latter made no attempt to get into conversation.

Mayo entered his office like a hurricane, and at least one office boy began to have visions of a fresh post.

"You're looking no better, old chap," Hobbs volunteered, entering the sanctum with a bundle of manuscripts. Hobbs was in charge of the literary laborers.

At his simple statement the managing editor looked up with a violent start. And Hobbs observed the start, and Mayo knew he did, and therefore lost his nerve at once.

"Yes. Yes. It's a man. A man with a Face."

"Eh?" gasped Hobbs.

"The most awful face," his chief tried to explain. "You can't imagine it. It just makes me sick. He keeps following me about and watching me, day and night."

Hobbs regarded Mayo very closely.

"Where?"

"Anywhere."

Hobbs dawdled uncertainly. Then he slipped noiselessly to the door, opened it swiftly and peeped out. He returned and hurried to the window.

"Nobody about," he said.

Mayo looked at him wearily, and when their eyes met his own shone with a quick fire.

"You don't believe me? I tell you there's a man with a horrible face always following me about. Go to the devil out of here! I can ring when I want you."

IN the corridor Hobbs ran into Reeves.

"I say, Reeves, old man, there's something wrong with Mayo. We've just had a bad scene and I'd say keep out of his way. He's got delusions. He's seeing faces. Awful wreck! Have a smoke?"

"Thanks," said Reeves. "Yes, I

know. He was telling me some rot about it last night. Overwork, old man. Going potty, most likely. So shall I, at this job. Lucky for him—he is getting a holiday. I see more than faces sometimes."

Reeves told Miss Masser, Miss Masser told Miss Grey, and during the morning the staff developed a peculiar way of looking at Mayo.

He noticed. It helped. He began by thinking that they were thinking he was going mad, and he ended by wondering.

Deep in his heart Mayo was beginning to doubt that the Face would ever go away. If the man had no reason for coming, what reason would he have for departing?

He's a lunatic, said Reason. How do you know? questioned Doubt. Tell the police, advised Reason. What about? asked Doubt.

"It's so silly," Mayo summed up.

HE lunched "in." Indeed he stayed inside his office for the rest of the day.

At seven o'clock he glanced out of the window. The man with the Face was on the corner, waiting, motionless. Their eyes met and Mayo ran to the door and summoned Hobbs.

He went too quickly to know that the man with the Face had gone round the corner.

"Come and see!" he cried. "Now, come and see, if you won't believe without."

He led Hobbs to the window and they looked out. Mayo sighed and Hobbs looked puzzled. There were a score of people walking below.

"Which one?" asked Hobbs.

"Not there," murmured Mayo. "Gone!"

"Look here, old man," said Hobbs, "if you'd like me to see you home——"

"Go to hell!" shouted Mayo, grabbing his hat and tearing out of the office.

FRANK MAYO had never been a coward. He would have faced a charging bull and never turned a hair. He would rather have welcomed a charging bull.

It was the fact that there was nothing charging about the Face that was wearing him down. This and his already worn-out nerves.

A hitting man likes something to hit, and this was giving Mayo nothing to hit. And the life he had led for ten packed years, the grind of it, the recurring tension that seems to be the soul of journalism, the responsibility—all these had tuned him for his present panic.

An outburst, as the doctor had warned him, might weaken his reason. And yet the alternative was meek acceptance.

This evening he shrunk from a four-mile ride under that pitiless gaze. He turned left instead of right, and over his shoulder saw the man with the Face turn left, too.

He led the way through the gay streets as far as Bush House, turned up Kingsway, crossed Holborn and plunged into the dingy backwaters of Clerkenwell. Always behind was the man with the Face.

For the first time the nerve-shattered man began to be afraid. But some of his old hitting power was left, and he had a mind to brave it out and reach conclusions.

He turned a dark corner and waited; and when the man with the Face appeared he stepped forward and gripped him by the arm.

"Now!" he exclaimed. "An end to all this! Open your ugly mouth and tell me what it's all about. If I snap off your arm I mean to make you tell me. Out with it! Come! Quick!"

"Kindly take your hands off me,"

said the man with the Face politely.

His eyes were piercing. His awful face was close—too close. Mayo wanted to mask him and go on talking. Masked, he would have been tolerable; his voice was not unlikable. But like this—bare—close——

Mayo flung the man off and tried to keep the power in his voice.

"Tell me!" he cried. "Tell me!"

A POLICEMAN appeared at the corner and Frank waved his hand.

"Officer," he said. "This man—this man here—this—this man——"

"What about him?" the policeman said.

"Following me!" Frank gasped. "Always following me!"

"What you following this gentleman for?" the policeman demanded of the man with the Face.

"I am going home," the fellow answered in the same gentle voice. "I live the other side of Clerkenwell Green." He gave a name and address. "I'll welcome any inquiries you care to make about me. I shall be pleased to accompany you."

He pointed to Mayo. "Ask him if he is following me!" he added.

The policeman looked at Frank.

"Followin' you home, you said, sir. Oblige me with your card, sir?"

"Why — why — why — why——" Mayo cried wildly. "Here you are."

The little card dropped from his shaking fingers and the constable had to stoop for it.

"I've been very ill—nerves," Mayo explained.

"Ah!" said the policeman. He read the card. "Golders Green? Bit out of your way for home, sir. I thought you said *he* was followin' *you* home?"

"I mean — I mean——" Mayo stopped and stroked his forehead.

"His face!" he gasped. "His—FACE!"

"Well, of course, sir," said the policeman discreetly, playing with his mustache.

The upshot of it was that the man with the Face went on his way unmolested and disappeared from sight across Clerkenwell Green, and the policeman advised Frank Mayo to go home and have a night's rest and sleep it off.

Explanations were impossible. Besides which Mayo was weary to his very bones. His brain was incapable of clear thinking. Somehow he made his way to the nearest Underground station and sank feebly into the first seat of the first train.

Just before the train moved out a man entered the carriage and sat opposite and began to stare. It was the man with the Face.

FREDA was very placid. Annoyingly placid. Tonight he did not seem to want a calm after storm. He wanted someone to quarrel with. And Freda, of course, never quarreled.

He found fault with things and she agreed that there was fault to be found. She filled his pipe for him, and he had not the heart to curse as he wished.

She asked for no further news of the man with the Face, and out of all the thousands of words in the language he could not find one with which to start to tell her. He felt caged—locked behind bars.

He went to bed early, but not to sleep. Just to think and think and think.

In the morning he rose at half-past five. There was nobody in the street. He went downstairs and made some tea.

THAT day Freda and the children went down to the sea. Frank saw them off at Victoria and promised

to write daily and to join them by the noon train on Saturday.

After their train had pulled out he left the station, nearly colliding with the man with the Face, hailed a taxi and went to the office.

All morning he sat with his head on his hands, doing no business. All afternoon he restlessly paced the office.

Since the encounter at Victoria in the morning he had seen nothing of the man with the Face. But he knew that very soon that old man of the sea would turn up again. Beneath the treatment he withered like a plant that is exposed to moonlight only.

He thought of the coming nights without Freda, and his resistance crumpled in a moment. He made half a dozen telephone calls, handed over his office to Hobbs and took a bus to the station.

He spoke to nobody during the journey down. He read nothing, saw nothing, thought nothing. His being was come to a great blank, and he did not care much what lay ahead.

He had to clasp his hands to keep them from shaking. He had to keep his feet firmly on the carriage floor, so that his fellow passengers should not guess he was shaking all over.

He was glad when the journey came at long last to an end. He stepped down to the platform and passed through the gates into the streets of Mortimer Beach. Two yards behind he saw the man with the Face giving up his ticket.

"By Heaven!" he muttered. "I'll kill him! I'll finish him! I'll be rid of that devil before the night is through!"

Mayo knew Mortimer Beach well. He went straight ahead, down to the sea front itself, whence a fresh, cool breeze was blowing. It was a pitch black night and the lamps along the promenade looked more futile than usual.

Mayo cast a glance behind. Save for the man with the Face he was alone. He walked hurriedly westward in the direction of his bungalow.

There was a light in the window that seemed to give him courage and hold out friendship. But he stopped a quarter of a mile away, jumped down to the pebbles and walked to the water's edge. Presently he stopped.

FIVE minutes passed and then there was the crunching of pebbles at a little distance. Mayo swung round and faced his torturer, who, however, passed by and seated himself on a crumbling breakwater some yards beyond.

Mayo followed and stood towering over the fellow.

"Well?" he said menacingly.

"Well?" said the man with the Face.

Mayo flashed his hand from his side pocket and held it in front of the ugly face, disclosing a revolver.

"You see this?" he cried. "You see it?"

"I wouldn't mind," said the man softly. "I don't believe I'd defend myself."

The breeze from the water was striking colder now. Mayo shuddered as he put away his revolver.

"We all have our ambitions," said the man with the Face.

"What?" said Mayo.

"If I had asked you, two days ago, to give money, much money—a thousand pounds—to me, a perfect stranger, what would you have said?"

Mayo looked startled.

"Would you have refused?"

"Go on."

"You'd have refused. Anybody

would. But I don't think you'll refuse now."

Mayo gasped and pressed his fingers on his right temple.

"I have worked hard all my life," the man with the Face went on. "All my life. I have been conscientious and faithful to my employers. But I have no conspicuous talent and my price has always been very low.

"Besides, my face has been against me. People hate my face. Men do not like to look at me.

"I have had to suffer many changes. I was never allowed to settle. I am ugly. I am unsightly. I am vile to look at. I was always sent packing when they tired of my face—and that wasn't long."

He glanced at Mayo, who gave no sign that he was listening. The man with the Face threw three pebbles into the invisible sea before he spoke again.

"Last summer, on a moor in Devon, I found a little cottage that seemed like paradise to me. I have a wife and three nippers, the only ones that love me, the only ones who are not afraid to look at me.

"We pretended that one day we'd settle in that little cottage, right away from where people stare. We could be happy there.

"Only it never looked like coming to anything. It would take a thousand pounds to pull it off—or, say, thirty shillings a week. That is very little for a man to ask."

SUDDENLY, for the first time in Mayo's experience of him, the man with the Face was swept by passion.

"You are going to give me that money!" he said through a hiss. "You! A thousand pounds! A thousand pounds to keep me out of sight!

"It's no use talking about police to me. I hold no black secret from your past over your head. I don't know you—but you'll do for me! I threaten you not with yourself, but with myself.

"Fail me, turn me down, and I'll haunt you as you've never been haunted before. I will be night and day beside you, but I'll be careful to do nothing for which you can ask protection of the authorities. The streets are free to me—the trains and the restaurants as open to me as to you. I shall not molest you, and, by Heaven, it will pay you not to molest me!

"But always I'll be *there!* Think of the great time you'll have explaining me away! Why, you'll *never* explain me away! Your friends will think. Your wife will suspect. They'll be just unable to believe the truth.

"The truth will sound too silly—so silly that you'll never attempt to tell it. You'll invent some stupid lie about me and be tripped up over it!

"And when I die, as die I must, soon, for I am near the end of my resources, I will drag my breaking bones to your very doorstep and die there! I will!"

He sprang back a yard, clapped his hands and tittered.

"Men will couple your name with mine forever! They'll talk of us together. Will you hold up your proud head then? They will ask what it all means, and *you* won't dare to tell them the silly truth. You won't dare—and nobody else can!

"They will draw away from you and whisper—whisper. In the end, perhaps, you'll go mad!"

He drew his coat about his cold bones and went suddenly quiet.

"A thousand is a very cheap release—a release for both of us. What do you say?"

Frank Mayo stirred like a man coming out of a trance, stirred and shook his fist at the man with the Face.

"What do I say?" he roared. "Why, you poor babbling madman, I say the only thing that any man would say. Be off with you! Rattled as I am, you shan't fool me with a maniac scheme.

"Get out! Out of my way!

"It's the concoction of a broken mind. Stand aside, or I'll throw you in the water! You're too pitiful to shoot! You poor, crawling, *ugly* imbecile!"

He flung the man with the Face aside and ran up the beach toward the welcoming light. The man who was too pitiful to shoot dragged himself to his feet and followed, but more slowly.

"That doesn't end it!" he cried. "We'll see whose mind is broken first. I'll haunt you—*haunt* you I tell you. *I* don't care what happens!"

FRANK MAYO gained the creaking veranda in front of the bungalow. The French windows to the lounge were closed, but he did not hesitate. He flung them back and strode through. Freda, his wife, let a book fall to the floor as she rose to greet him.

"Frank! What is this? I thought you were in town. I——"

"Whisky!" he cried hoarsely.

"But tell me!"

"Whisky! Whiskey! Dear, can't you hear me? Whisky! The poor clumsy fool! The blackmailing idiot! Blackmail! Me! I could have shot him where he stood!"

"But—— Who is it?" Freda Mayo's cheeks were the color of the pages she had dropped. She clung unsteadily to the edge of the table.

"That fellow with the infernal Face! Ha! ha! He met his match, I think! Let him show up again and I'll pump lead into his ugly hide. I'll rid the world of a blot! Where is the whisky?"

"You're shaking, dear. The excitement! You really mustn't. Sit down and let me——"

But he was already gone from the room, exploring other rooms for the spirit for which every shred of his body craved.

Freda Mayo's calm returned as quickly as it had departed. She walked to the French windows and looked out into the blackness. She could see nothing.

She walked out to the veranda and listened. She thought she heard the movement of human feet on the pebbles.

"Is anyone there?" she called.

Out of the gloom, into the light from the room behind, came a man, a man with the most frightful face she had ever seen. A feeling of sickness passed over her at the sight and she had to look away.

"So—you do exist?" she said. "I doubted."

"Yes, madam," said the man with the Face.

"I am Mrs. Mayo," Freda went on. "I am his wife. Will you let me talk to you?"

"Yes, madam," said the man with the Face.

WHEN Frank Mayo, having discovered the whisky and taken more than was good for any man in his state of health, at length stumbled back into the lounge, Freda was standing beside a little writing desk in the far corner, closing the lid. The French windows were shut and the curtains drawn.

"Sit down, Frank," she said.

He sat.

"I needed that drink," he said. "Heaven, how I needed that drink!"

He looked across the room at the long drawn curtains and winced.

"He will not trouble you again,

darling," said Freda. "He's gone. He'll never come back."

"How do you know?" he whispered.

"I do know. I bought him off. Two minutes ago I gave him a check for a thousand. It was my own money. He is gone now. He'll never come back."

Frank Mayo buried his head in his hands and groaned aloud.

"Oh, Freda! Freda! Why—why—why? Why did you?"

She sat on the arm of his chair and put her arms round him.

"Whatever you may have done before I met you," she said gently, "I shall always love you, Frank"

He sat erect with the spring of a man suddenly shot and stared at her.

"Eh?" he gasped. "Freda! I haven't done *anything!*"

But she only smiled in that strange, inscrutable way that women have, drew him to her, kissed him and stroked his hair.

Sunk by the Spider

Were it not for the spider—so they say in the interior of Togo, in Western Africa—dead men could come back to earth just as does the moon, which dies and returns to the sky.

It happened this way: When Mawu created men he said: "Whenever a man dies, he shall come back to earth to live again."

The spider overheard him and shook his head. "That is not well," said he.

Then Mawu took a calabash and set it gently upon the waters and said: "As the calabash remains always upon the surface of the water, so shall each man live forever upon the face of the earth."

But the spider was still displeased. He seized a stone and hurled it into the water. And the stone sank quickly out of sight, leaving only a few momentary bubbles in its wake.

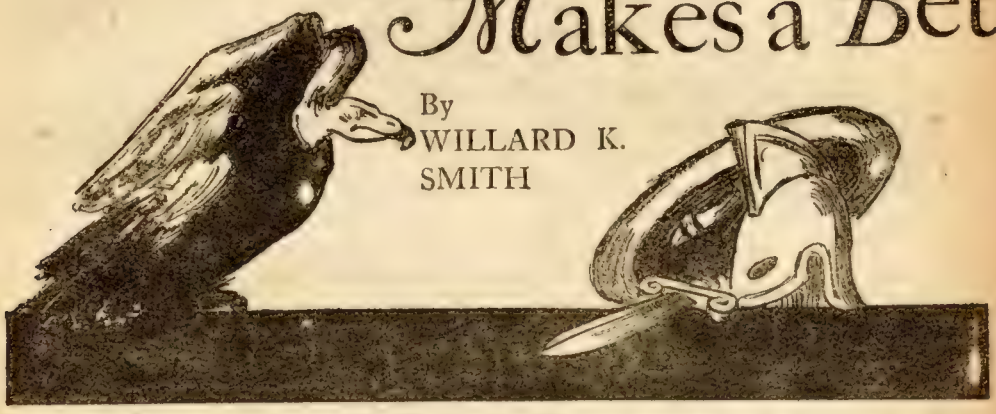
Then the spider prompted the god: "Mawu should say—Man that is born upon the earth shall die and vanish like this stone, and not come back again." And Mawu nodded assent.

Soon after these things had taken place the mother of the spider died. The spider hurried to Mawu and begged him to retract his sentence of eternal death. But the god refused to do so.

And this is why—so they say in the interior of Togo—no man can ever return from the land of the dead—at least not in the flesh.

Philadelphia Makes a Bet

By WILLARD K. SMITH



"PHILADELPHIA" Smith, known to his A. E. F. paymaster as M. S. Smith, Sergeant of Ordnance, 1st Class, sat in a little cafe overlooking the canal just off the main thoroughfare of Bar-le-duc, France, and expounded to his companions on the state of the war, the deplorable condition of the Air Service, and the ignominy of a fate that made such a fighting man as himself bear the detestable insignia of the Ordnance Department.

"They's fifteen or more Ordnance sergeants, Sergeants of Ordnance and First Class Sergeants around these diggin's and I'm the only one that's seen fightin'.

"They's clerks, stenographers, machinists, carpenters and even a butcher in that bunch and what they all know about real war put in six-foot letters wouldn't cover a cootie's top side."

"How come you're in the Audience Corpse?" asked a corporal of the Aviation Section. "Where did you do your fightin' so noble?"

"Philadelphia" turned an indignant face toward the doubter.

"See that stripe," he put forth his right arm which carried a wound chevron. "I didn't get that layin' in bed back in the S. O. S and have a packin' case fall on me. I got that down near Swoissons when the Jerries tried to get my machine gun.

"I was in a M. G. company, God bless 'em"—he raised his glass—"till some stinkin' squarehead snook up on our flank past the lousy infantry and threw a potato masher bomb at us. Just when I had my sights on a whole platoon of Jerries comin' through the grass."

"Yeah," was the none too interested reply. "What did you do then? Wake up and find yourself still full of coniyac?"

Smith ignored the insult in order to finish his story. "I goes to the horsepital and then gets sent down to Blooey for reclassification. No chance of gettin' back with the bunch.

"Three captains and a major looks me over, consults nineteen kinds of pink and yellow cards and then puts me in the Ordnance and finally I gets sent up to this Aviation rest camp of yourn to show youse guys how to use a machine gun."

"You ain't showed me much," commented Aviation Sergeant Britt, the third member of the party.

"I don't need to," Smith replied. "You'll never have a chance to use one. Believe me, if they's one bunch that's havin' an easy time of it in this war, it's them pilots. Even more than the Ordnance which is sayin' a lot.

"Not you so much, Serg," he added, by way of apology. "You're worked enough fixin' up the planes those fancy britches are crackin' up all the time. They're the ones I mean.

He stopped and ordered another drink of wine. The attention of his companions was temporarily taken by the entrance of an aviator escorting an attractive looking French girl.

"There's one of 'em now," continued "Philadelphia," sipping his wine. "Always with the best pickin's in town. Fat chance for an enlisted man in this place with ten thousand trick looeys paradin' the streets lookin' for company."

"Yeah, that's the way. And they gets double pay for flyin'. Why, I wants to know? They don't take half the chances of the infantry. When I was lyin' in the front line I didn't have just one or two Jerries tryin' to get me. They was four divisions of 'em, all tryin' to come through, besides machine guns, 88's, and army artillery makin' a barrage in front and behind. It's not like bein' up in the blue sky where you can go any direction you want to get away. The infantry and machine guns gotta stick and take it. Flyin's a soft job, believe me."

THE CORPORAL held no brief in his mind for his superiors in the Aviation Service, but he resented disparagement from this new-comer who wore an Ordnance bomb on his collar. He might have been in front line, but that gave him no warrant for a continued tirade.

"Well, if it's such a soft job, why don't ya get a job as a flyin' officer? Oughtn't to be hard for a smart, brave soldier like you. None of 'em got any brains 'cordin' to the Audience Corpse."

"Well," replied "Philadelphia," casually lifting his glass, "I've thought about it. And when I gets to wearin' my little gold bars, I'll bet I'll make one corporal do my dog robbin'."

"You've got as much chance of gettin' a aviation comish as I have of sockin' General Pershing one on the jaw 'cause my shoes is too big," commented Sergeant Britt.

"Yes, and if you ever go up in the air, it'll be in a balloon or on top of a shell," put in the corporal.

"Them balloonists haven't got it so easy," replied "Philadelphia." "They's no snap to bein' two thousand feet up tied to a rope and havin' a squarehead flyer come alongside close enough to shoot the buttons off your blouse. I had in mind bein' a balloonist."

"Say, I wish I could get that way on two drinks of this vin rouge," responded Britt. "You're in the bloody Ordnance till the end of this stinkin' war, and your day of winnin' medals was over when that Jerry let go with his potato masher."

"Yeah," added the corporal. "Youse soldiers that was lucky enough to be in one fight give me a pain in the right ear. I don't see any cross de guerres on your bosom for all your fightin'."

"That's 'cause I wasn't up in a plane for the generals to see what I was doin'. But let me tell you this—I'm goin' to take a cross de guerry back to my girl and I'm goin' to get it up in the air, too, with all the A. E. F. that can get in our sector lookin' on."

"Listen to him," Britt called to an adjoining table, whose occupants turned questioningly. "Here's a guy in the Audience Corpse sayin' he's goin' up and win a basket full of medals, goin' to pick 'em off the Jerry aviators while they're flyin'."

"Let him rave," came back a reply, "They'll be sellin' medals cheap enough in another month when the war's over."

"Philadelphia" was not dismayed. Apparently he had made up his mind not to be kidded on this subject.

"Anybody here want to lay any bets I don't bring down a Heinie plane in the next month all by myself?"

A SERIES of loud guffaws from all within earshot greeted this bold statement.

"He's nuts from eatin' too much goldfish," explained Britt. "The poor goof is shell shocked too. Claims he was in a machine gun outfit over at Swoissons and now wants to be the only hero in the A. E. F."

"Anybody want to lay any money?" repeated "Philadelphia." "Youse Kiwis give me a pain. All you do is massage these ships after some college boy wearin' an open front blouse has got all the glory and the extra pay flyin' 'em!

"Who trains 'em to shoot? Who keeps their ships from cavin' in on 'em? Why they can't even start their engines. And you don't win any medals with a polishin' rag, a chunk of waste and a spanner."

He had taken a popular theme. A dozen aviation mechanics edged in to hear him tell of their troubles and ambitions.

"You said it, buddy. They gets the glory and the dames while we gets the hard work and the cussin' out for dirty spark plugs after some mamma's boy aviator has been floodin' his engine with oil."

"Yea," continued "Philadelphia," what ya goin' to do about it? You're all kiwis—they named ya right—birds with no wings and all bill.

"But I ain't, see! I've seen fightin' and I've laid more Jerries kickin' in the wheat than your whole lousy squadron has. And if them three fancy S. O. S. officers hadn't chucked me into the Ordnance I'd be layin' out in the front with my machine gun now 'stead of wastin' my time with a lot of chauffer's helpers."

This was no sympathy, it was a frontal attack bolstered up with a colossal vanity on the part of the attacker and the result was a torrent of recrimination.

"PHILADELPHIA" gave back curses and sarcasm until his previous statement about a bet was brought up.

"You talk big for a guy that's only wearin' chevrons. I thought you was carryin' three stars on your shoulder. How about that bet you was wantin' to make?" asked a sergeant.

Smith had perhaps just been talking big, the not unusual outburst of a real soldier itching for action in a position where no action was possible. Perhaps, too, there was an idea in his mind that he had been harboring for some time. At any rate he could not back down in the face of all that he had been saying.

"All right, I said I was lookin' for

bets. I got the best part of six hundred and fifty francs here and back at the field. I'll lay it all, one to two—that's fair odds—that I bring down a Heine ship all by myself by next payday and I ain't ever been up in the sky at that.

"And if I don't get one, I'm makin' this condition, we leave it up to the Major of the squadron that my try at it will be worth the money. Somethin' might go wrong and I wouldn't wing him good enough, but I'll guarantee a show worth the francs."

Some demurred at this condition and at the odds but those who held back with their bets were outnumbered by those who saw a chance to make some easy money by payday.

To them the thing was impossible. "Philadelphia" was to have no aid from a pilot—that is, he was not to be taken up as a machine gunner in a fighting plane—that was too easy.

He was not to do it without witnesses, nor was he to attach himself to an Archie battery. The anti-aircraft guns occasional did wing a German plane, not often it is true, but this chance was eliminated from the bet.

"Philadelphia's money was soon taken up. The response discouraged him not a bit, rather it egged him on to more assurance.

"I'll make it an even thousand francs—I can borrow enough to make good. Come, you pikers, I'll show you that a First Division machine gunner's got the guts." He drained a glass that the French cafe keeper had set down at his side.

"Put up your money. Sign your names on this slip with what you bet. You're bettin' against the best machine gunner of the best machine gun company in the best division of the whole A. E. F.!"

Surely this was the maudlin talk of a vin-rouged sergeant; but since he was willing to back his words with French banknotes they could not take exception to his ethics, however they might deride the apparent vain-glorious boasting in his talk.

THE NEXT day, Smith was a marked man. His bet was talked about in all the cafes of Bar-le-duc wherever Aviation enlisted men foregathered. At the flying field fifteen kilometers away and three back of the front, the details of the bet reached beyond the Squadron Major to the Divisional flying officer, and thence to the Aviation General at Army Headquarters at Souilly.

But no one could get a word out of "Philadelphia" as to how he was going to win his bet. There were many conjectures and many vain schemes were planned out by the takers of his bets, in an effort to substantiate their judgment in taking his money.

"He's a crack machine gunner," explained Sergeant Britt," and pretty darned good with a Chauchat automatic rifle. I've seen him place forty-five outa fifty shots in a jumpin' target towed behind an automobile. What he'll do, I'll bet, is to put a machine gun up somewhere and try to talk a Jerry to comin' down and listen to how he stopped the whole Heinie army at Swoissons."

"Philadelphia," himself, after the glow of wine and the zest of argument had worn off, it must be secretly admitted, was not as optimistic as he had been.

The audacious plan he'd been turning over in his mind for several weeks, when accomplishment became necessary, seemed to have taken on a number of difficulties which, though previously considered, now loomed a dozen times bigger. And more than that, the element of personal risk became an item of even greater moment.

The prestige of the machine gunners was at stake, as well as his own honor and a thousand francs which

could be turned into two hundred dollars of good American money; so he had no alternative but to go ahead, at whatever risk of life, limb and fortune the venture would involve.

The widespread publicity of his bets helped him in that his subsequent absences from the field were overlooked as being almost in the line of duty by all except his commanding officer in the Ordnance department.

Perhaps some of "Philadelphia's" disdainful words regarding his captivity in the Ordnance Corps had come to the attention of his superior. At any rate his captain was not helpful.

"This fool sergeant of mine has got himself in a pickle and he'll be trying some crazy hocus pocus to get himself out of it," Captain Warren explained to the Squadron Major. "Probably kill himself in the bargain by stealing a plane and getting us all in trouble. The Lord knows, he's the best machine gun instructor and repair man I've ever had, and they're hard to get.

"I'm not going to have to fight Corps headquarters again for somebody to fill his place if he gets hurt. I want him kept at work and not given any chances to break his neck or ruin one of your planes. You won't have any help in an alibi from me if an inquiry is held in a month from now."

"He won't get a plane from my field," responded the Major, "but I'd like to know what the devil he's planning to do.

"An Ordnance Sergeant more or less doesn't mean much to me, losing the pilots I am with these rotten ships. I'd just as soon give him a chance to break his neck, to find out if he's got anything new with which to trick this German Flying Circus that's been playing the hob with our gang. Two more yesterday, besides two balloons.

"Artillery headquarters was on the wire today raising Cain because they claim we don't protect our observation balloons. God knows I can't spare pilots to chaperone those sausages. I haven't half enough planes, and every one of 'em has to be over the Jerry lines on reconnaisance work.

"Between that and straffing their trenches regularly and bombing their dumps, I've got my hands too full to watch that sergeant of yours. If he can bring down a plane, I'll personally write to the Army commander, outside of channel, and recommend him for anything they'll give him."

"He's got as much chance of that as you have of lassoing Schneider, the big Hun whose circus has been bringing your men down. And he's too good a sergeant to lose on some harem-scarem scheme."

The telephone tinkled at the Major's elbow.

"Hello! Yes, this is QZX. Another balloon? How about the observers? Both jumped safely, eh? Balloon burned. All right, all right! I know. But I haven't got any plane to protect 'em. Well, take it up. It's been taken up and they know the fix I'm in. All right."

The major hung up.

"That's the fourth sausage in three days. Why can't the artillery learn to shoot without balloons? We run 'em up in the air and hardly get the cable unreeled when down comes a Heinie plane casually taking his time, and 'zup,' we've got one less balloon.

"That devil Schneider shot at some observers coming down in parachutes the other day. Flew down past them and give them a pan or two. Stinking beast! And the sausage falling in flames right above them, at that. Burned a pilot, too."

THE MAJOR and the captain turned to their duties. Smith knew nothing of the discussions his café activity had aroused. He was concerned with his own troubles.

About four kilometers from the flying field was a regiment of 155 m. m. field guns, huge, powerful weapons, practically the largest mobile artillery in the Army. The guns were placed by batteries along two kilometers well back from the front.

They had an effective range of 10,000 yards, and for accurate firing it was necessary for them to have air observers, either in balloons or in planes.

Balloons were preferable if protected from attack by anti-aircraft guns or defending planes along the front. The balloons were at hand and they were used.

Attached by thin, strong, wire cable to windlasses mounted on trucks, these huge hydrogen-filled bags were floated aloft, and their pilots telephoned down the result of the firing, correcting distances and brackets.

When hostile planes were sighted the balloons were hurriedly brought to the ground; but frequently the German planes flew so high that their approach was not seen until one or more swooped down from the clouds on the balloon.

The observers had but one chance: they could jump before the bag burst into flames, for the attackers used incendiary bullets and generally waited until they were close enough to make every shot a hit. Frequently German planes came as close as fifty yards.

Smith in the pursuance of his plan spent one afternoon reconnoitering at an insignificant cross-road where in an adjoining field lay a balloon company.

A great sausage-shaped bag lay spread out on the earth being repaired. In a dugout nearby were the tanks of hydrogen gas, and packed cleverly away into compact cases was an extra balloon.

"Philadelphia" learned that this cross-road was to be a more or less permanent headquarters for the next week.

There was little occasion to camouflage a balloon. Once up in the air it was sight for all the world, and the advantage of a permanent position lay in the fact that its very permanence protected the guns in that they could be moved to new positions without moving the gas-bag and thus giving the enemy an idea of the new placement.

HE MADE friends with the second sergeant and learned some details of the command. There was a captain generally in charge who did not go up. Several lieutenant observers went up regularly, but due to the German control of the air, ascents were being made less frequently than ever.

"We hardly get the bag up," explained the second sergeant, "'fore the Jerries come over and we've got to have it down. Lost one a couple of days ago."

Smith looked over the lieutenants with the appraising eye of an army sergeant used to sizing up new commanding officers. He selected one of them as a man probably amenable to suggestion, and one who would not high-hat an unknown sergeant too severely.

He approached casually and deferentially asked several questions about the work that was going on and about balloon observation in general. The lieutenant answered him fully, and even asked him if he wanted a job as ballast. Smith had sized up his man correctly.

The lieutenant noted the Ordnance insignia on Smith's collar, as well as

the flying field badge on his shoulder, and asked him what he was doing away from the field.

The sergeant had a glib enough answer and led the conversation to souvenirs—German helmets, Lüger automatic pistols and German field glasses. Smith had seen a number of cases of captured equipment come into a nearby Ordnance dump, and knew that it would be quite possible for him to supply any balloon lieutenant's craving for souvenirs. And this lieutenant, it appeared, wanted a Lüger rather badly.

That was a sufficient opening for "Philadelphia." He casually remarked that he could get the lieutenant a Lüger—no trouble at all and no charge.

"You goin' to be around here for a couple a days?" Smith asked.

"Looks like we'll be here till a year after the war's over. Or at any rate, till they move the guns up."

"Well, I've got to get back to the field, and I'll drop around with the gun, lieutenant."

He saluted and pursued his way back to the field.

TWO DAYS later he was back at the balloon camp. His lieutenant greeted him.

"Hello, sergeant! Got that Lüger for me?"

Smith produced the automatic. He had visited the dump where, for the promise of an aeroplane ride, which he did not know whether he could make good on, he had gotten the pistol from a fellow sergeant in the Ordnance.

The lieutenant was pleased as a boy with a new toy. Smith offered to show him something about the mechanism of the gun and, following his demonstration, led the conversation around to balloons and the possibility of going up some time.

The lieutenant thought it was possible. Then Smith broached the plan he had been nurturing for weeks, and upon which his rash bets had been based.

It was an astounding idea and the lieutenant frankly said it was impossible.

But Smith persisted in pointing out the fact that it might succeed and that it involved no risk for the lieutenant, who had to go up anyhow, and that if the plan was successful it would teach the Jerries a lesson and possibly bring about a much greater safety for all balloonists.

Smith won the argument, and a promise that any time he wanted to go up, the lieutenant would see that he could, provided, of course, that the company captain did not object or was not at hand when the balloon left the ground.

THUS fortified with an initial success in his scheme, "Philadelphia" returned to the field where he ran into Sergeant Britt. The latter accosted him:

"Where's them Heinie aviators you was goin' to lead in by the hand? Did you know payday was next Tuesday? Maybe you found a French beagle hound and have been out in the woods trainin' him to fly."

"Got any more money you want to put up?" asked Smith. The die was cast for him and he could afford to bet a million. If he didn't make good the chances were that he would be killed or laid up in the hospital and the little matter of betting debts wouldn't bother him then.

Britt thought he would bet a little more money, and Smith had him record his wager with the Red Cross man at the camp commissary.

Smith's prompt taking of the money bothered Britt a little. Smith was crazy in his opinion, but

not crazy enough to deliberately lose over a thousand francs. But not a word could the bunch in the Red Cross hut get out of him on how he was going to accomplish the feat.

"I said I'd show youse aviation birds how a foot soldier goes about bringin' down a Hun machine," Smith replied. "Think I'll get that squarehead Schneider. A guy over at the balloon company was tellin' me how he makes a specialty of shootin' down balloons 'cause they can't fire back.

"He's my meat. I'm postin' a notice up on the bulletin-board that I have staked out a claim on him. Anybody want to lay any money five to one I don't get him?"

A gasp of amazement went up. This poor, flat-footed, conceited slob of an Ordnance soldier wanting to bet that he'd bring down the most-talked-of German flyer on the front and within four days—for payday was close.

"I said it," replied Smith to their taunts. "Put up or shut up. Them's my odds—one to five. The chances are bigger than that, but I want to be philanthropic with you bozos. I got a date in the next two or three days with that big Hun, and you can all see the way I'll call his bluff.

"The only thing is this—if no Jerries come flyin' around this sector before payday, why you've got to give me time until they do. I can't go out lookin' for 'em all over the front."

This point was argued back and forth, but the Red Cross man, who was pretty well liked and respected, agreed with Smith that it was a fair condition to make. So more bets were made and Smith reckoned up that he stood to lose about 1,600 francs or to win about 5,000.

ON EACH of the following days he slipped away from the field and appeared at balloon camp. He returned later in the day. No one knew where he was except that word was received that a strange sergeant with a Chauchat automatic rifle had been seen hobnobbing with a lieutenant observer. The balloon, however, was not sent up.

Payday arrived and "Philadelphia" strolled down to the signal hut where telephones connected the various sector activities. He wheedled the Signal Sergeant into letting him talk with an officer in the balloon camp, and the Sergeant later reported that he guessed the officer had told Smith they were going to put up a balloon that afternoon.

SMITH left and went over to mess very much preoccupied. He attended casually to some duties right after noon mess and then disappeared. An hour later an Ordnance Corporal appeared at the Red Cross hut and posted a notice scrawled in Smith's handwriting:

"To the 354th Aero Squadron and All General Officers," the notice read. *"Them what laid their bets on Machine Gunner Matt S. Smith maybe will have a show for their money somewhere over about the Fromagery road this afternoon, providing the dirty Jerries come out to take a chance with me.* (*Signed*)

"Matt S. Smith,
"Ordnance Sergeant 1st Class
Machine Gunner 36th Company."

The word passed around the field almost before the note was posted, and work by the enlisted personnel practically stopped in the ensuing discussion, and an endeavor to secure vantage points from which sky in the general direction of the Fromagerie Road could be seen through the trees and camouflage that protected the hangars.

The Squadron Major became aware of the sudden cessation of field activities and was not long in finding the cause. He sought the Ordnance Officer.

"That sergeant of yours has got this field all tied up in a snarl. The entire pay-roll has apparently been bet on a scheme of his which he has notified an expectant world will be pulled off this afternoon somewhere over by that balloon company, and all work's stopped."

The Ordnance Captain called several of his men.

"Where's Sergeant Smith?" he demanded.

No one knew.

"Find him and be quick about it."

But he was not to be found. Some one reported that Smith had been seen an hour or more before slipping off in back of the field carrying a Chauchat rifle and three boxes of ammunition.

THE CAPTAIN hurriedly went into the store-room where three Chauchats had been kept for emergency purposes. Only two were on hand. He came back and called the Officer of the Guard.

"Sergeant Smith is absent without leave, and has taken a Chauchat rifle, special government property, with him. From what I learn he's gone over in the direction of the Fromagerie Road. I order his arrest."

The Officer of the Guard saluted and suggested respectfully that Smith would probably be back that night and could be arrested then; besides, he had hardly any men to spare for a search party. The planes had gone up that morning and were expected back—that is, some of them were, anyway.

The Ordnance Captain appealed to the Major.

"What's this? Are you all rooting for this Sergeant of mine. I tell you he's going to try to pull some half-baked stunt that'll lose us a lot of property, cause an injury, and get us all in bad with headquarters for lack of discipline. God knows there's little enough of it now."

"Don't blame me, Captain," replied the Major. "He's your man, not mine. You don't come under my jurisdiction, as you were so careful to point out when you arrived. Get up your own posse."

"All right, I'll do it. I'm not going to lose a good sergeant. If it comes to that, I'll pay off his bets myself, and keep our slates clean."

He picked up his telephone and called the balloon company headquarters.

"Can't get 'em, sir," was the reply over the wire. "They're up observing and connected direct to an artillery regiment H. Q. Nobody can cut in except the Corps H. Q."

The Captain cursed his luck, then gathered two of his men, had them put on their side-arms and borrowing the Major's car, started off toward Fromagerie Road where the long 155's had already started to fire.

BACK on the field the Squadron Major with a ground officer or two and the pilots off duty gathered together in front of a hanger that gave a clear view to the westward.

"I believe this sergeant's got the stuff in him to pull something pretty good. The Lord knows what. Anybody ever hear of a plane being shot down with a Chauchat?"

"They claim a machine gunner got Richthofen from the ground," replied a pilot.

"That's all the bunk," differed the Major. "He got hit in the air a half hour or so before he fell. I've seen the Archies shooting up the sky for a year now without doing more than

rocking a plane, and any machine gunner who can stand his gun up on end and follow a plane with it is doing a miracle."

"There goes the sausage up!"

They all looked eagerly and saw above the trees the profile of an observation balloon about three miles away. It slowly rose in the air to a height of about 2,500 feet. Above it was an American plane, making wide circles.

"That one of our machines?" asked a pilot.

"Yes, I had to detail Wallace to work around that way. The 345th squadron is to send a machine over, too. The balloon crowd claim if we were patrolling the front properly the Jerries couldn't get over to bother 'em. That to me, with three Huns in the air to every plane I can put up."

"Is this soldier with Wallace?"

"No," spoke up a ground officer, "I saw him get off and he was by himself. He hasn't landed to pick anybody up."

They watched the balloon for ten fifteen, twenty minutes. Nothing happened. Another American plane had come up from the east and was now high in the air circling between the bag and the front, three miles distant.

"Well, we can't wait here all day; there's work to do," ordered the Major, and the group slowly dispersed to their duties. The soldiers watched with disappointment and then turned to their tasks, keeping their eyes cocked on the sky in the direction of the bag.

ABOUT a mile back from the field was Divisional Headquarters. The Corps Commander was there and with him the most important personage in the American Expeditionary Force on a brief tour of the front to lend his presence, advice and commands to the preparations for a general attack that was to take place the following week.

The Division General was duly impressed and flustered by the presence of the only Four-starred General in the world and his several staff officers.

They had come out of the shell-wrecked house that had been made over into rough divisional offices and all stood in the small yard, discussing a few last general directions.

The General of the Armies turned an attentive ear to the sound of artillery firing which had grown louder during the conference. He looked questioningly at the Corps Commander.

"155's," was the answer. "I've got them all working this afternoon while observation is good. There's been a suspicious concentration back of their lines, as we reported to you Wednesday."

He with the four stars on his shoulder nodded assent. Way distant on the skyline a balloon was visible which he studied a moment.

"Pretty close to your guns," commented the General.

"They've been moved regularly, sir, to new positions, and we haven't lost a man. But we've lost two balloons. Very poor air protection. No planes."

The General shook his head slightly as if the subject of air protection were a subject that nettled him.

"Glasses!" He put forth his hand for field glasses.

A pair was offered and he adjusted them, focusing on the balloon which came up bright and clear in the lens, every detail sharp.

Above the balloon suddenly small cotton balls appeared, bursting and then dissipating.

"You're going to lose another balloon," was the comment of the General of the Armies.

"Those are Archie shells," said a

staff officer more or less to himself, "they must have spotted a Jerry plane."

Two small specs appeared in the air, getting somewhat bigger as they came back toward the balloon from the direction of the front.

"I've got two of our planes protecting it," explained the Corps Commander's Chief of Staff. "That must be them. I don't see any German planes yet."

The balloon started to descend. The officers could visualize the hurried efforts of the ground men as they started the reel to wind in the long rope before the German planes could get close enough to fire.

The balloon twisted a bit as the pull came on its ropes then steadied and remained in position.

"Why don't they pull it in?" asked the Divisional General.

Before anyone could offer an explanation, there came an exclamation of surprise from the Commander of the A. E. F.

"Great Scott," he ejaculated, keeping his eyes glued to his glasses. "There's a man climbing up the side!"

EVERY glass in the group was gotten out and all saw what the General had seen. From the basket suspended thirty feet below ran a dozen ropes, which passed upward around the bag. On one could be seen the figure of a man climbing sailor fashion. Across his back was slung what might have been a rifle.

They watched him breathlessly, all thought of great plans for the offensive being forgotten in this extraordinary spectacle. The man reached the bottom of the bag and apparently experienced difficulty in climbing around it.

They could see him swing down a couple of times and the swaying of the bag at this disturbance of its equilibrium. He was lost to view for a minute against the color of the silk covering and then his progress could be seen at the top as the bag sunk a bit beneath his weight.

At times he almost disappeared again in the dimple made by his weight. Then they saw him unsling a rifle and put a magazine in position.

The Corps Commander gave a mighty oath.

"That's some observer with a Chauchat rifle. He's going to try to pot those Hun planes."

They all looked above the balloon which had now begun to descend. A mile higher, one, two, three then five specs appeared falling almost vertically in a huge V formation.

A staff officer spoke up.

"Good-night, that's Schneider and his circus. They'll catch our planes and the balloon, too."

THE FIVE planes covered that mile of vertical height in considerably less than a minute. The American ships frantically started up to meet them.

Four German planes detached themselves from their leader and directed their flight toward the two Americans. Puffs of smoke could be seen as they started firing their machine guns.

The leader of the five continued his way like a plummet toward the balloon. The Archie bursts were well behind him. He was going too fast for the gunners to adjust their fuses.

The other six planes manoeuvered for position, the Germans apparently content for a moment to force the Americans away from the bag.

The lone enemy plane slowed up a bit as it came within a thousand feet of the balloon and then straightened out. This was necessary, as the bag was within the same distance of the ground and the German could not take a chance of crashing. The officers could see that the plane was

painted brilliantly in green and red stripes.

"That's Schneider all right," spoke several at once, echoing the cry of a hundred breathless watchers at the aviation field a mile away.

A form knelt on the top of the balloon holding a rifle breast high. The pilot of the approaching plane may have seen him or not, but gave no indication in the handling of his plane that he had.

From the basket a figure plunged out, a parachute stretching like a huge tail from his shoulders. The observer had jumped, taking no chances on the slim possibility of success of the man above him.

He could not see Schneider's plane, but he heard it and he knew what ordinarily would happen. Besides they had given him orders from below to jump. There would be a burst of shots, a roaring of gas, and then an explosion as the hydrogen caught fire from the incendiary bullets.

The green and red plane swooped down at an engle of thirty degrees, ready to climb again. The pilot had his finger on the trigger of his machine gun when a burst of shots came from the top of the balloon.

THERE was a sudden stillness all along the sector. Apparently the American army had stopped all effort at war making to watch this struggle in the air.

A thousand, ten thousand, perhaps a hundred thousand eyes saw the plane falter and dip first on one side, then on the other. It tilted suddenly and almost crashed into the bag, fell end over end, then swooped crazily downward. From it catapaulted the figure of its pilot, who fell faster than the plane.

And in a half minute after this sudden climax, the balloon disappeared slowly beneath the trees as it was hauled to safety, it's sole gunner still firing at the distant German planes who were engaged in a stiff fight with the protecting Americans.

The General of the Armies of the United States turned a drawn face to his officers. He looked at them for a moment, then said, "Great Scott!" The Corps Commander started to reply, but the General continued.

"Have that man report to me, and recommend him personally, yourself, for the Congressional Medal."

THE Ordnance Captain arrived at the balloon camp just as the balloon was being pulled in. He had seen none of the spectacular air fight, and the ground crew of the balloon were somewhat in ignorance of what had happened because they had not been able to see on top of the bag.

They had seen a man climb out of the basket and disappear over the balloon. Then they saw the observer jump and had been amazed to see a German plane fall after him.

The Ordnance Captain jumped out of the car.

"You in command here, Captain?" he asked the ground officer.

"Yes, sir, what can I do for you?"

"I'm here to arrest an Ordnance Sergeant of mine. Have you seen such a man?"

An enlisted man spoke up:

"Yes, sir, he went up the bag and climbed up on top. I guess he's still there, 'cause we ain't seen him fall off yet."

The huge bag now filled the space above them and every one had work to do.

"Get that car out of the way," ordered the ground captain, and the Ordnance Officer hurried to obey.

A great mass of bucking silk and canvas slowly settled to the ground and the men grabbed and hauled on its dangling ground ropes. They secured them to trees, anchors and

blocks, and the balloon settled down on the ground as the men pulled the basket from under.

A voice hailed them from the air:

"Say, any of youse bozos got a ladder? I skinned my hands all up climbin' up here."

"You climb down," cried the ground officer. "We can't let the gas out to make an elevator for you. What happened to that Jerry plane?"

Sergeant Smith looked down with amazement.

"What happened to it? What do ya mean? I shot that Heinie out of it."

The ground officer called back: "Come down out of that. You're through joy riding on this ship."

"Philadelphia" Smith's superior officer looked at him severely.

"Smith, you're under arrest. You can thank the Lord that nobody knows much about this joy ride or you'd be reduced."

"PHILADELPHIA" painfully let himself down the ropes and stood on the ground clenching his sore hands.

"Say, Captain, you've got it all wrong. I just shot down a Jerry plane like I bet I would. It was a green and red one, like Schneider uses. Give him fifty rounds just as he was gettin' close. Grips, but his plane went gefritz!"

"You shot down Schneider?" the captain gasped. "You're crazier than ever."

"Something happened to a Heinie plane up there, Captain," said a corporal. "Maybe he did get him. It crashed over there in the woods. A search party's gone to find it."

"If you can collect on that story you're welcome to it, but it don't affect the fact that you're under arrest. Take that rifle of his," the Captain ordered.

THE TWO soldiers moved forward toward Smith, but turned around as a car came snorting along the road and veered off into the clearing.

A lieutenant colonel with the black stripe of the General Staff around his sleeve stepped out. All snapped to attention and saluted. He waved them to ease and asked:

"Is this the balloon that was just up?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where's the man who was on top and shot down that enemy plane?"

"Philadelphia" looked startled, and then his face beamed. "Confirmation," he thought, "from the General Staff."

The balloon captain pointed to Smith.

"There he is, sir."

"Come along with me, Sergeant. You're to report to the Commanding General of American Expeditionary Forces."

Smith looked at him with the utmost amazement. This wild idea of his had worked! But the words of the Colonel did not sink in deep enough.

The rest understood better that Smith's exploit, by some amazing chance, had come to the attention almost immediately of the far-off presence that directed their destinies, and that Smith was to be honored by a personal interview.

"Philadelphia" Smith stepped forward.

"Yes, sir, Colonel," he faltered, "but—but——" He turned despairingly to his Captain. "Captain, I can't. It's payday and I've got to get back to the field and collect them five thousand francs 'fore the boys start the blackjack games."

Dead Men Make No Music

By
EDWINA LEVIN MacDONALD

One expects anything to happen in that curious and ill-assorted archipelago that lies—at times so beautifully luxuriant and at others so bleak and wind-swept—in the mouth of the great Father of Waters.

In this story of Romance, Mystery and Adventure—spiced with dashes of good, wholesome humor—Edwina Levin MacDonald has played the most delicate and intricate harmonies of emotion upon the heart-strings. There is never a discord; never a false note in the sweeping melody of the tale of young love; never a break in the swift, steady rhythm—leading inevitably to a smashing climax.

CHAPTER I

OUR OWN SOUTH SEAS.

IN New Orleans and the lower Louisiana Parishes there is a persistent association between Barataria Bay and that lawless band of buccaneers who commanded its jungle waters for many years under the leadership of the resplendent Lafitte.

Here, in a shimmering vastness of blue sky and emerald water, on the fringe of the Gulf, lies that curious and ill-assorted archipelago of the Mississippi Delta which someone has likened to "souls of Eternal Spring smiling beside souls of Despair."

On the one hand you may see an island of tropical luxuriance, orange and banana groves surrounding a great manor house, and unbroken rice

fields criss-crossed with irrigation ditches, giant oaks heavy with trailing bloom, white beaches—— On the other hand, a wind-swept expanse of wire grass, its dreary reaches heaped with drift and decay, its sandbars covered with dead porpoises and oyster shells—an unmarked grave perhaps of teeming life and beauty.

Now and again the monstrous old Gulf rising up in the night shrinks back with the dawn—and where fields and houses and men were but yesterday there is a swirling of drift and corpses . . . a silence broken only by the shrieking of sea scavengers.

And New Orleans does not hear of the disaster until the next weekly boat goes out and returns.

In the olden times the islands were days away from New Orleans. Now they are but a day by the canal short-cut. But still no telegraph, no telephones connect them with the mainland.

Thus, amid a witchery of summer that knows no end, they brood in overwhelming insecurity and primitive isolation which has long been crime's invitation and tragedy's ambush.

If a man disappears there are no prying police. His family asks for him—a shrug of the shoulder—a gesture toward the convenient sea—that is the answer and the end of the matter.

ONCE in a blue moon, however, it is not the end of the matter; as was the case with Pierre Meynard, of whose sad and improbable life and strange death the authorities of Louisiana are still unaware.

The tragedy of the House of Meynard had its inception in the distorted love of a woman more than fifty years ago, and on an August night twenty years later two young men met in a deserted tower by candle-light, a storm howling outside, to settle the matter with swords, and thereby engulfed themselves, as well as everyone connected with them, in deeper tragedy.

It is a temptation to begin with that night; but I must tell the story as it was unfolded to me through the adventures of a beautiful girl who became the principal pawn in this tale of greed, hate and revenge in the summer of 1915 when the story of the death of Pierre Meynard had become but a legend to New Orleans—one of the many legends of Barataria and the Gulf.

CHAPTER II

THE INVITATION

WAS sitting on my bed wondering if I should pack. If, in fact, my people would be able to have me come to New York for the summer. There was a knock on my door, and to my great surprise Odollee came in.

During my two years in the convent I had never heard of her entering any girl's room. And if she had I would have heard of it. She had no room mate as did the rest of us, but there were rumors of luxury glimpsed by girls as she passed in and out—bizarre luxury in such a place—rich rugs, costly vases and lamps, flaming scarfs and soft tapestries.

Closing the door, she stood with her back against it as if to bar us from possible interruption.

"Jackie," she said, "I heard you say the other day that you didn't know whether you would go home for vacation or not this year."

"No," I replied, too surprised even to ask her to sit down. "Mother and Dad are actors and they have been practically out of work for months, just playing an occasional part in a stock company or a vaudeville sketch in and around New York,

and they've had hard sledding to live and pay for keeping me here.

"I doubt if they've saved anything for my railroad fare. Sister Aloysia wrote mother that if I can't go home they will board me through the summer for fifteen dollars a month; so I expect I'll stay. You'll be here, too, won't you, Odollee?"

"No. It was of that I came to speak with you. I am going home. And as there are no young girls in Stone Gables my father tells me that I may bring a friend with me. I thought if you were not going to your people you might like to go home with me."

"Your father!" I gasped. "Why, I thought—I don't know why—but I thought you were an orphan. Why, Odollee, you've never been home for vacation before, have you?"

"No. My father has been traveling. But," her dark eyes grew luminous, "I am eighteen now—and I am going home." She put her hands to her bosom in a gesture of passionate elation. "Ah, Jackie, you perhaps do not know what that word 'home' means to one like me."

I had risen upon her entrance and we were still standing. Now I sank back on the bed and motioned her to one of the two wooden chairs. She paid no attention.

"No," I said, "I never had a home and somehow I've never missed one, so I don't know what it means to anybody. My home has always been in my trunk, or where Mother and Dad were. And that seemed good enough."

"Yes. Where they were. That was home. This place"—she made a spreading gesture with her creamy hands—"a prison. Only, of course, because it held me from my father, my home. The Sisters have been good to me—like mothers—and yet always," again she laid both hands on her heart, "a void was here. But will you come home with me, Jackie, for the summer?"

"Wait till I see if I've a dollar in my purse." I sprang up excitedly. "If I have I'll wire Dad. I expect he and Mother will feel it's a Godsend to have me taken care of for a whole summer." Then I stopped in dismay. "How much will it cost to get to your home?"

She shrugged curiously in the foreign way she had. Everything about Odollee was foreign. Foreign and chiseled, from her small, high arched feet to the crown of her arrogant little head. Yet you could identify her with no place or people.

Heavy, dead gold hair, huge dark eyes, usually veiled by long lids, her skin a deep cream, almost golden, and a full red mouth, aloof, insecrutable, she, nevertheless, gave an impression of the tremendous and furtive passions of Far Eastern peoples. To me there was something volcanic in the very stillness of her low voice, the slow grace of her slim body.

"I have money," she said. "Naturally, I shall pay your expenses. It is very little. A short way by train, then a day by boat, beyond Grand Isle. Meynard Isle is in the very throat of the Gulf, I believe."

MEYNARD ISLE. So she was one of "The Strange Meynards." As an outsider I had heard much secret speculation among the Louisiana girls concerning Odellee's name as belonging to an old family in the Delta to whom the French King had made a vast grant of land which had never passed from them.

They were very rich, lords of a small kingdom, living to themselves. This much everybody knew—but little else concerning them.

"The Strange Meynards!" The words rang in my mind; but they sounded no warning to my daring youth.

"Don't you remember at all?" I asked.

"No; I came here when I was three."

"And your father, has he never been to see you in all that time?"

"He has been abroad." Her voice was suddenly cold, as if to say she thought me too inquisitive.

Then, softening: "I'll send the telegram if you'll give me your father's address. But tell none of the girls where you are going. The Sisters, yes, but no one else."

AS IS the habit of actors while the money lasts, Dad wired consent. Accustomed to take life with a careless regard for today, and an abiding faith in tomorrow, it never occurred to him to inquire into the matter of my trailing off to a strange island with a girl of whom he knew nothing.

The main thing with him was that it was the end of May, always a trying time for actors, and that I was seventy-five dollars away in a Louisiana convent. An invitation from "Miss Meynard of Stone Gables" sounded rather splendid, and was most convenient.

I could see that the Mother Superior was surprised and troubled over Dad's telegram; but there was nothing for her to do but let me go.

THE LITTLE station platform was thronged with girls, a number of whom were leaving for New Orleans and points this side.

They all evinced considerable curiosity over Odollee's departure of which they had known nothing until she climbed into the school hack with her baggage and accompanied by me. But they hadn't the courage to quiz her and I resisted their efforts to separate me from her.

I was enjoying in a detached way their wondering discomfiture, when presently my attention was caught by a little pig-tailed Chinaman in a black satin coat and civilized trousers whom we'd seen before standing just outside the convent gates.

As there were no Chinamen in the village adjacent to St. Cecilia his presence was remarked on after the manner of girls who exclaim over anything that drifts across their adventuring vision.

He stood alone, at some distance from us, a slim, straight and very still figure, his hands clasping his wrists within his loose sleeves, gazing imperturbably down the railroad track, apparently unaware of any other presence. So exactly had he stood outside the big gates; he had not glanced in our direction as the school hack passed out into the road. He had no bag and seemed to be there for no purpose.

However, in the wild scramble of emotional good-bys as the train rumbled in, and in the excitement of the trip, I thought no more of the Chinaman until we reached New Orleans, when I discovered him following the porter who had taken our bags. And then, of course, I could not be sure it was the same one.

But when he stood in exactly the same position on the edge of the pavement as our porter called a cab I not only felt sure he was the same but a vague uneasiness assailed me.

And looking back I saw him hail the next cab, nod quickly toward our cab and jump in. And from the expression of the driver's face, his curious look first directly into my eyes, then down as if noting our number, I felt that he had been instructed to follow us.

But it was not until several days later that I voiced my uneasiness to Odollee, or indeed until it became a definite suspicion. After all a Chinaman more or less has no place in the thoughts of a young girl living in princely style in a princely hotel with

gorgeous shops calling to her to come and buy.

Odollee said her father had written her telling her where to stay in New Orleans until we left for the islands the following Wednesday.

Every morning during that week of waiting we left the hotel at nine o'clock. And always there was the little Chinaman near the exit door.

"I believe he's the same one that came down on the train with us, followed us to the hotel and has been hanging around the door ever since."

"Followed us to the hotel!" laughed Odollee. "What an imagination you have, Jackie! I suppose that's the actor temperament always ready to dramatize trifles."

"It isn't a trifle to catch a Chinaman on your heels every time you turn around."

Odollee was too happy to bother about anything just then and, to be quite truthful, I couldn't get a square look at the Chinaman's face. Dodging back against traffic, he seemed to me to give one darting glance at us or at something in our neighborhood and went on down the street in the opposite direction.

There was no Chinaman hanging around the hotel upon our return. Odollee did not mention it but laughed slyly at me.

However, I had thereafter a feeling that we were followed by strange men every time we were on the street. Odollee was lovely enough to have men following her around, but it occurred to me that at least one of the men she, or we, attracted was not flattering.

He was short, dark, with square jaw, square shoulders, square feet, square hands, square head and baggy trousers, which probably covered square legs.

But there was one of her, or our, admirers who took my breath away.

CHAPTER III

THE SWOOP OF THE EAGLE

WE WERE looking for a Turk, "Mr. Smith" by name, who'd been recommended to us as giving the best marcel this side of heaven.

Odollee's hair is long and heavy and straight and she wears it in smooth folds like a turban of gold about her head. But my hair, like myself, is inclined to lightness and frivolity and must be put in irons at least once a week to keep it at home.

We had passed "Mr. Smith's" without knowing it, as everybody does who expects to see a sign of some sort by way of hint that he is curling hair in the neighborhood. Across the street was "the square man" pretending to take a great interest in old harnesses displayed in a dirty window.

"There's a friend of yours, Odollee, about to buy a harness," I said.

She looked surprised. But before she could ask questions that would have led to remarks concerning actor imagination, I added: "The famous Lafitte used to have his camouflage blacksmith shop somewhere in this neighborhood. Let's find it since we can't find Mr. Smith."

After a short walk along the route which a policeman had directed us, we arrived at our desired goal.

We stopped before the house, silent, awed by the glamor of those days when Lafitte and French New Orleans were resplendent young villains together.

The walls of the old house dissolved before my eyes and I had just established a beautiful picture of its interior—a great room blackened by the smoke, a tall dark movie hero outlined against the red fires of the anvil—when a door opened and he stepped out into the street—Lafitte come to life!

There was no longer any doubt in

my mind about this reincarnation theory. There he was! I couldn't doubt my own eyes.

I'VE SEEN all the matinee idols and movie heroes, but he was all of the best of them assembled. His lean virility, aristocratic features and great, dark, heart-smashing eyes made me gasp. And when he stopped short at sight of us, his head was lifted as if in answer to the sound of his distant guns in Barataria Bay. His splendid eyes ignored me completely, holding Odollee alone.

And looking at him I had a swift impression of a young eagle about to swoop down upon my poor friend. I should not have been at all surprised if one of his long brown hands had reached out, entangled in her hair and the two of them had disappeared in the blue.

So fascinated, hypnotized was I by his sudden appearance, his splendor, that I had no time to look at Odollee. In stage parlance, we "held the picture" less than a minute, but it seemed eons before he recollected that he was staring at a beautiful stranger as no buccaneer in Fifth Avenue clothes should do.

His swarthy face grew suddenly dark with a rush of blood, his eyes shifted and lifting his nineteen-fifteen Panama, he murmured: "I beg your pardon," in soft Southern English and turned hastily down the street.

"Well!" I gasped. "Are you by any chance his long lost sister, or the princess he captured and killed on the high seas?"

"As to that I can't say," Odollee responded in a low voice. I looked at her in astonishment. Her face grave, her eyes followed him eagerly. "But I've seen him before—somewhere."

"Not at St. Cecilia." I was still inclined to facetiousness.

"No. It must have been before I went there. And yet—he looked different." She began walking slowly, her eyes on the ground. "Somehow there's the picture in my mind of a face—old and—yes, ill—and beautiful—like his."

"Wake up," I said. "He's hypnotized you. He had me going for a minute. He looked for all the world like an eagle——"

"Ah!" she broke in. "An eagle. Exactly. You always find the right word, Jackie."

"LET'S go to the ticket office," I said. "It's a good thing we are leaving tomorrow or you, or I, or both of us, would become 'cases' for alienists. Why didn't your father meet you here, anyway?"

"He wrote that he would surely be here today," she replied, flushing. "But that if anything prevented him, we were to take the boat just the same. He would expect us tomorrow evening."

"If nothing prevents! I've a feeling we are facing a preventive. Anyway I'm on my way to a railroad and navigation office I spotted yesterday. Here we are, little one."

We stepped in and learned that while this particular office did not handle the trip, the boat left every Wednesday by the canal *short-cut*, returning on Thursday and going out again on Saturday, when it did not return till Monday.

AS WE stepped into the street again there stood Mr. Squareman engaged in earnest contemplation of a placard in the railroad window outlining a trip around the world. Odollee saw him as soon as I did and a swift glance at her face showed me that she was at last startled and uneasy.

Approching him, I said: "Looking for harness?"

Odollee was frightened by my boldness and tried to draw me away.

The man smiled. "I don't get you."

"Well, I get you," I said furiously. "This is the fourth time I've seen you in two days and I don't enjoy the sight of you. If I see you again, ever—even in the distance—I'm going to call a policeman and let you explain why two girls can't walk out without being trailed by you."

"That's all right, lady," he grinned. "I can explain right now. My Chief gets a letter tellin' him that Miss Odollee Meynard is stoppin' at the Grunewall Hotel, and bein' she ain't used to a big city and the writer not bein' able to meet her here, would the Chief detail a man to see that she don't get lost nor bothered by nobody?

"The Chief detailed me. And he says the letter says I wasn't to say nothin' to you, to worry her about bein' looked after less'n she seen me and got skert. But if she did I was to say her father had paid me to watch out for her till she was on her way to the Islands."

I looked at Odollee. There was something mighty funny about all this to me.

"So my father won't meet us?" said Odollee with disappointment, but clearly accepting the queer business as all right.

"Guess not, from the letter."

Odollee, taking the whole situation as a matter of course, questioned the man further. But he had told all he knew in the first explosion, except that the letter had come by messenger on Friday, and that there was a big yellow-back enclosed; another would follow.

But, he volunteered, the first one covered the service even if the second didn't come. I thought the uncertainty he thus expressed showed that he felt there was something unusual about the transaction.

"Don't you know who employed you?" I asked, "so you could collect the full amount?"

"Well," he hesitated, "the letter was from P. Meynard and must have come from Meynard Isle. The Meynards are good for their bills; but the Chief said he thought he knew all the men folk out there and he couldn't recollect one with that initial. But may be so it's one of the women folk."

"That's my father's initial," said Odollee.

"So?"

"You say the letter came by messenger on Friday," I put in, recollecting something. "Was the messenger from Western Union?"

"No. I was there when it come in. Brought by a Chink."

"A small Chinaman in a black satin coat, with a pigtail?"

"That fits him."

I gave Odollee a significant look, but she was graciously thanking Mr. Squareman and turned away with an air of mingled disappointment and satisfaction.

"I wish Father could have come himself to look after us. But then I'll see him tomorrow night." Her dark eyes were triumphant, the pale gold of her skin was touched with joyous color.

"It was Friday, Odollee," I said, "that I caught that Chinaman following us. And he knew I caught him and disappeared."

"For goodness sake, Jackie," she said sharply, "why do you harp so on that Chinaman? Even if he *was* following us, he was probably one of Father's servants who had to go back on the Saturday boat, which was why he gave the letter to those people—detectives, I suppose."

"Well, I would like to know what is going on," I said.

"You prefer to go back to St. Cecilia?" Her voice was cold.

"Don't be a fool," I laughed. "At least all this funny business is more

exciting than a convent in summer time. And when it comes to that I'm a pig for excitement."

AFTER a long silence I remarked: "I don't suppose you happen to have in your possession any jewels of great value."

She stopped short, facing me squarely. And there was alarm in her eyes. "Why did you ask me that?" she demanded.

"It's in the play," I grinned. "You see, there has to be a reason for good drama. If you, as the lead, should have in your possession a jewel of great price, then there'd be a reason why a gang of thugs should be after you. And just see the suspense it adds if the audience knows or suspects about the jewel!"

Her face, usually pale, had grown waxen. Her eyes fell and she turned and walked on. "I'm afraid after all I don't care for the play," she said coldly.

"Then let's go have an ice cream soda. I often leave before the last curtain when I'm bored. I saw twenty-three shows winter before last in one month. Got so I couldn't sit through three acts."

I led the way into a candy shop near our hotel. Odollee's extreme pallor did not subside, her laughter was a little strained and feverish, and she clearly didn't have her mind on what she said.

"A jewel . . . why did you ask me that?" Why, indeed? And above all why should she get excited over such a question?

That night she unlocked her trunk, took out a small black box, transferred it to her purse and put the unwieldy purse under her pillow. She'd been locking it in her trunk heretofore.

Another long silence. Then: "Well, we're leaving tomorrow. I'll be glad to get home . . . and nobody can molest us on the train or the boat."

"They couldn't very easily in America," I said.

"Well . . . this is America . . . isn't it?" She laughed constrainedly.

"It's supposed to be."

CHAPTER IV

A STRANGE WOMAN

THOUGH ten years have elapsed, the journey we embarked upon the following morning still stands stark in my memory. Not even the amazing events of that amazing summer can dwarf or cloud it.

We were just about ready to leave our hotel room when the phone rang to say our taxi was waiting.

"Did you order a taxi?" I asked, turning to Odollee.

"No," she answered blankly.

"Well, somebody's on the job this morning waiting with a taxi to take us somewhere."

"Maybe the hotel porter ordered it."

"They don't unless told."

"He may have made a mistake. We'll ask."

We did. And he hadn't.

"Well, please get one for us now," I said.

"Wait," I said when Odollee would have followed him. We loitered a moment while the porter piled our bags into a taxi.

Mr. Squareman was standing near the curb as we came out. He approached us affably. "Thought I'd see you started safe. Got a bus here for you." He made a motion toward a cab just behind the one which held our bags.

"Thank you, but we have ordered our own cab," said Odollee, slipping haughtily past him. I gave the waiting porter a quarter and directions to the chauffeur.

The last I saw of Mr. Squareman he was gaping foolishly after us.

A SHORT ride brought us to the ferry. On the boat, I looked back, but Mr. Squareman was nowhere in sight. There were several battered Fords on board evidently owned by men on their way to work across the river, but ours was the only taxi.

Across the river we came upon Algiers, and after a short drive our chauffeur pulled up before an architectural relic of the pre Civil War era.

"What's the trouble?" I asked.

"This is the station," he said, lifting our baggage out and carrying it to the edge of a long board-walk paralleling the railroad track.

AFTER a time a man hove into sight. There were in reality three men, but two of them might as well have been invisible.

"Odollee!" I gasped. "Look who's coming!"

Facing me, her back to the road—or street, I should say—she turned. Her slim body stiffened as she looked and saw our reincarnated Lafitte.

He saw us at about the same time, his pace slackening perceptibly as if he were about to turn back. As he passed us I thought he was going to speak. Instead, with grave face and eyes straight ahead, he lifted his hat. It might have been a sign of courteous recognition, or it might have been the action of a man who lifts his hat to set it more comfortably.

The other two men were in furious argument and barely glanced at us.

ODOLLEE turned and looked toward the far end of the long board-walk which was the station platform.

"I wonder if that woman is going on the train," she said musingly. "She hasn't any baggage. But she seems to be waiting."

I followed her eyes to a tall, flat-bodied woman some distance away, dressed as I had seen no one outside the theatre dressed. Of stiff gray taffeta, the skirt was very long and full, touching the ground all around, over starched underskirts. The waist fitted her square body snugly.

A thin, long neck was encased in one of those hideous boned collars belonging to Spanish War days. I could not tell whether she was young or old as her hat and face were entirely covered by the black grenadine veils worn when complexions were women's chief exchange for meal tickets. One sees these veils in the memory boxes of very old ladies.

And yet there was about this bizarre figure an air of virility seldom seen in very old ladies. At the same time an austere dignity, a want of suppleness, denied the thought of youth.

JUST then I perceived far down the track, backing in toward us, something which I supposed must be the train, but which looked like three covered wagon-bodies set on flat-cars.

The front wagon I presently perceived was marked "colored." The second was, I supposed, the smoker, and the third the general coach for whites. It came to a clattering stop in front of the relic.

The handsome Pirate looked up at sound of it and, as though suddenly recollecting something, hurriedly detached himself from his companions and started down the board-walk.

Yesterday in the habiliments of Fifth Avenue, today he wore khaki breeches with puttees, a white silk shirt open at the throat, and a Panama. I felt that but a red sash was needed to make him the perfect type of dashing bandit.

He did not glance in our direction but moved on to the Veiled Lady. They shook hands cordially. His back was turned to us and so tall and broad was he that her tall body was completely hidden from the waist up.

After a little he left her, walking more leisurely. And this time, though he did not turn his head, I saw him give us a quick, sidewise look.

An old Ford scuttled to the boardwalk and the station agent emerged and came running to help the Ford driver throw innumerable small bags of mail into the vestibule of the smoker.

The woman still stood beside the locomotive.

AFTER a considerable wait, while the trainmen were no doubt coaxing the old thing to go, I was almost jerked off my feet as I stood on the platform of the car watching the activity around me. There was a screeching—an agonized succession of screeches. The locomotive grunted and groaned and got under way.

The veiled woman's head lifted suddenly, as if she were speaking to the engineer. The engine passed her, then the "colored" coach, and still she held that pose of the head. As the smoker passed her, she flung up a black gloved hand, caught the rail of the rear platform and swung onto the step.

So casual as if this were quite the ordinary way for a lady to catch a train—a lady in long, full skirts at that. She was young, and no mean athlete, I decided. But why a modern woman, such as she must be, should wear such clothes was beyond me.

She stood easily on the lower step, in no hurry to come in, while the old coaches began a furious rocking as if to shake free of both of us.

I went inside. The three men were now seated just in front of Odollee. She was slapping mosquitoes, a pastime in which I immediately joined her.

Rumbling, rattling, screeching, with now and then an anguished squeal, the train crawled out into a waste of lowland bisected with occasional fields of cotton or cane.

Finally the Veiled Lady came in. She passed the men as if she didn't know them and sat down in the extreme rear of the car.

Though I could get no adequate idea of her countenance, her features were, I perceived, high and sharply defined through the tightly drawn veil. I felt rather than saw a pair of burning eyes fixed for a moment on us as she passed.

"I wouldn't mind having that veil myself," said Odollee, slaying a large gourmand on her cheek.

"When we get up speed," I said hopefully, "I suppose we'll get away from these beasts."

The stout old man turned around. "Don't build on that," he said with a leering wink. "We're in high speed now. And more likely the mosquitoes will stop us altogether after a while. They come down in armies when we get into the lowlands."

As we were already passing through the lowest land I'd ever seen, I thought he was merely trying to be "fresh" and gave him a cold stare.

He said something to the young man sitting in front of him and both the Pirate and the Scarecrow—the other man—turned to look at us.

The one I had thought of as the comedian of the trio because of his stout figure (which though not very short appeared so beside the towering height of the other two) I now realized was facially far removed from being a comedian.

Leathery skinned and grizzled, one eye was set distinctly higher than the other, giving him a Satanic expression which was not lessened by the

fact that he winked slowly, unmistakably at Scarecrow, whose owlish eyes were peering at us from behind thick glasses.

"Goodness," I whispered to Odollee when they turned and began conversing in low tones, "those men give me the creeps."

"The young one is very handsome," she whispered.

"The face of a pirate," I said. "And the one sitting with Scarecrow has the wickedest eyes I ever saw. Did you notice the way one is cocked up? I think he must have the evil eye."

Odollee made no reply; but a convulsive movement of her hand caught my eye, and I was surprised to see her quickly cross her fingers.

THERE'S something fusty about that veiled woman, I thought, my mind quickly jumping from one point of interest to another. I don't like her at all. But why am I thinking about her at all? Why have I never left off thinking about her since the first minute I saw her? It's not her get up. That would not have caught my attention. For queer get-ups New York can't be beat. A thousand a day.

There's something in this woman—*behind* the makeup—like the thing you feel in an actor when he's miscast. And yet she *holds* you; a miscast actor never does.

Odollee broke in on my thoughts. "Jackie," she whispered, "there's something about that woman that—I was wondering—I speak Spanish and French and have a smattering of Italian—she seems so alone."

So Odollee was as keenly aware of her as I was. "Girl," I said, "let that woman be. She wants to be alone. And I've a feeling that the further we keep from her the better off we'll be. There's an asp under that grenadine veil."

CHAPTER V

"DEAD MEN MAKE NO MUSIC."

NOW and again the train would stop at a cross-road, or a plantation gate and a white man would get out of the smoker, or a colored man out of the "colored" coach.

We were shut up in a hot train, on a hot day, in the hottest part of the South. But as terrible clouds of mosquitoes, with amazing frequency, would sweep up from the earth, speed toward us and fling solidly against our closed windows, I realized that the handsome Pirate knew this part of the country when he advised us kindly to keep them closed before he and his two companions retired to the smoking car.

Odollee sighed from time to time, a tremulous, long-drawn sigh.

"Haven't fallen for the Pirate, have you?" I asked.

"As to that, I can't say. He affects me in a very strange way. But mostly it is that I feel as if—oh, as if I had seen him before."

"Maybe you noticed him on the street in New Orleans," I said facetiously.

"No. Not like that. In a—well, a more intimate way."

"You're nutty."

"Perhaps."

AT TEN o'clock the railroad ran out against a canal. There wasn't any more.

We got out and stood on the rim of a ditch, there being no station, wondering what to do next. The Pirate came toward us along the side of the train.

"Are you ladies taking the boat from here to one of the Islands?" he asked.

Odollee said we were.

"It's a long walk," he smiled with a gesture toward a boat lying in the

canal about a half mile away, and picked up our bags. "The train porter will fetch your trunks on the wheelbarrow."

"A wheelbarrow won't hold both," said Odollee.

"He'll make two trips. The boat will wait."

He made several attempts at conversation as we trudged over a little tram road paralleling the canal; but Odollee was silent, trying to recall something, and I was thinking about these men who had come with us all the way from Algiers and were apparently going on into the Delta.

All the other passengers had left us at the various stops along the way. The woman had dropped off the train on the opposite side. I'd seen her walking rapidly away toward a two-story wooden house across the track.

Odollee, the three men and I were clearly the only Delta passengers and I didn't fancy a trip on strange waters with three strange men as our sole companions.

Nor did I find relief in a view of the boat. It was about twenty feet long, having a small cabin with a bench against each side, and run by a gasoline motor.

The Captain was brown and wrinkled and as hard-looking as a walnut, with a fierce mustache and sharp eyes. He had one helper, a sullen young Creole.

Several other boats lay against the rickety wharf, but there was no one about them. Our hand baggage was piled without our leave on the narrow stern of the *Vale*.

Whereupon the young man, finding us cool company, lifted his hat and walked down the wharf to where Evil Eyes and Scarecrow stood. He had not offered to help us aboard.

The Captain was tinkering with the engine and there was evidently no hurry. The boat was intolerable. The land steamed beneath the furnace of the sun.

"Is this the boat to Meynard Isle?" I asked. The Captain scowled up at us, eyed me a moment, then:

"Thass right. Why you t'ink no?"

"I didn't think it wasn't. I want to know if it is."

"Well, thass right." He bent to his tinkering.

"Is there any other boat to the islands?" I persisted.

"Not to-day." He did not look up from his work.

"Well," I said to Odollee, "we may as well go aboard. As well die in the shade of suffocation as to burn up. Anyway," I added by way of self-consolation, "I'm having an experience I never expect to have again. And there's nothing like new experiences if you survive them," I answered with a significant glance toward the three men.

She laughed gaily, if Odollee could ever be said to laugh gaily. "A presentiment?"

Her laughter irritated me. But to my credit I never afterward reminded her of my omniscience regarding those men. To tell the truth, events piled up with a terrifying rapidity that left litle room for snugness.

"Laugh if you like," I said with asperity, "but those men are more interested in us than seems necessary to me. It isn't a presentiment; it's obvious."

"Because the handsome young one helped us kill mosquitoes and with our bags?" she smiled.

"No, because they keep talking about us. I can tell by the way they turn and look in our direction from time to time."

"They may be discussing the boat. It bears discussion."

"Then they're late discussing it. It isn't new to them. They know all about this country—the flat lands, the mosquitoes, where to look for the

boat, and which was the right one."

"Anyway, there's the Captain to protect us," she laughed.

"I don't trust that old buccaneer any further than I can throw a house," I said. "Nor his helper, either. Come right down to it, we don't even know we're on the right boat."

"What reason would they have for carrying us off on the wrong one?"

"I don't know. Maybe you do. I might if I knew more about you."

Her smile died and quick color stained her pale cheeks. "I feared you'd feel cheated," she said with lowered eyelids.

"Oh," I cried contritely, "I don't, Odollee, I don't. I was joking—mostly. So," I added, "we aren't through with her yet, either."

DOWN the tramway came the lady in the veil. She was walking briskly, but with oddly mincing steps for so tall a woman.

Behind her trotted a young negro carrying a large covered hamper. She approached the three men and handed what looked at our distance like a writing pad to the Pirate.

He looked at it. Wrote down something, and handed it back to her. The men took off their hats and with a stately bow she returned to the waiting negro.

The Pirate had followed her. He seemed to give some instructions to the boy. He lifted his hat again to the woman as she turned away.

I was surprised recollecting that the three men had paid no attention to her on the train. The boy brought the hamper and set it inside the boat on one of the seats. I lost sight of the woman.

Now there came a loud explosion of the motor. The captain stood up and called to the men on the wharf. They came hurriedly and, climbing aboard, sat outside on our baggage.

Suddenly the young man sprang up and held out his hand to the veiled lady. She stepped on, ignoring his hand, and came inside and sat down just against the door.

Taking not the slightest notice of us, she rested her head against the door-jamb, her face turned partially toward the men outside. They were silent, gloomy.

The old captain was stirring up thunder with his engine.

And now we were off, Odollee and I sitting stiffly against the wall of the tiny cabin. Off for where and what?

MY EYES kept straying to the woman, so still against the door-jamb that she might have been asleep. But I knew she wasn't. No drooping of that erect figure. Even the black gloved hands in her lap, though in complete repose, were curiously *awake*.

I noted that her features, outlined through the veil, were nobly cast. Large yet fine, and her head was lifted with an air of arrogance.

Whether she ever glanced at us I could not tell; but no matter where I looked I felt burning eyes on me. I grew self-conscious, fidgety, resentful. Her silence and stillness so disturbed me that only by an effort of will could I keep my eyes off her.

She had clearly indicated that she had no friendly inclinations toward us, and I had no desire either to speak to or look at her. Yet look at her I did in spite of myself.

I felt that never had I been in such a compelling presence. Without a word or gesture, without exposing her face even, she commanded attention. Here was the thing we talked so much about, especially on the stage, and nobody could explain—"personality."

THE MEN had broken the silence which at first held them. Some violent dispute was in progress. Their

voices rose and fell but their speech was drowned by the high chut of the motor.

The quarrel was evidently between the old men. The young man listened, grave and perturbed, putting in a word only now and then. Scarecrow talked and talked, Evil Eyes' leathery skin growing redder and redder. He gesticulated, speaking in sudden explosions.

From time to time the young man reminded him of our presence as I knew by the swift glance the old man would turn toward the cabin and the sudden lowering of his voice.

He was more obvious than the other two. Their faces showed nothing. He, on the other hand, grew almost apoplectic at times.

Once he sprang up as if to jump off the boat. "I won't discuss it with you!" he shouted. "Good God, man, men have been put behind bars for less!"

The Pirate said something in a low tone and Evil Eyes, with a glance at us, lowered his voice after that. But the woman, leaning against the door-jamb, her face half turned toward the men who were quite near her, must have heard their every word. They must have known she heard. It was only of Odollee and me that they must be careful.

The long morning wore on. Whether that strange silent figure by the door depressed us, or whether deep within us, half hidden from ourselves even, we were terrified over this journey into the unknown I do not know, but there seemed nothing to talk about.

But the argument outside in nowise abated. Nor Evil Eyes' explosions. Now and again I caught fragments of his speech: "Fool reasoning ——" "You'll be locked up yet——" "I've been in this game long enough to know what I'm talking about——" "It's the only sensible way to look at it——" "Dead men make no music, I tell you——"

"Dead men make no music——" The words repeated themselves in my mind, over and over with the insistence of a refrain. "The only sensible thing to do—locked up—dead men make no music."

CHAPTER VI

LOST IN JUNGLE WATERS.

THE WIND blew mournfully across the rice fields, blending them in vast, smooth sweeps like enormous bayous grown slightly stagnant, stirred into somnolent rippling action.

The only sign of man in relation to these fields was an occasional dark curl of smoke very far off against the cloudless blue. The houses, if houses there were, melted into the blur of distance.

I stood up to relieve my cramped muscles. The handsome Pirate, seeing me, rose and came inside. The woman moved for the first time to let him pass. I noticed with surprise that he neither apologized nor thanked her. He merely nodded as he passed.

She went outside and sat in the place he had vacated.

"Aren't you girls famished?" said the Pirate with his engaging smile. His teeth were very white in his dark face and something in his luminous brown eyes reminded me of the dizzying light of the land.

"Let's have some coffee, Joc," he said, addressing the young Creole beside the captain.

"De win' she too strong fo' light stove," replied the boy, straightening up without turning around.

"Put down the windows," commanded the Pirate, adding to us, "Joc would evade breathing if it required any effort on his part."

"Don't they serve a lunch on the

boat?" I asked. "I supposed they would."

"Yes, of course." He took the cover off the hamper the woman had sent. I went to help him, and Odollee watched us in silence.

THERE was enough in the hamper for ten people; two fried chickens, a variety of sandwiches, two bottles of wines and relishes. That it was his own private hamper I was convinced. He had not wanted to embarrass us by offering to feed us.

The Creole boy had sullenly lighted a two-burner gasolene stove near the engine, and now he announced that the coffee was out.

"You knew it was out day before yesterday," said the Pirate. *"I told you to get some."*

My heart missed a beat. *"I told you to get some."* Then this boy was in his employ!

"Is this a private boat?" I asked sharply.

The Pirate was opening a bottle of olives. He gave me a swift glance, then, his eyes falling to the olives, said: "Why do you think that?"

"Because you ordered the boy to get coffee."

"Oh, I came in on it day before yesterday and knew the coffee was out. I reminded him to get it."

They had told me at the ticket office that the boat left the mainland every Wednesday and returned on Thursday, remaining in the canal and making no further trip till the following Wednesday.

This boat had *left the islands* on Monday, laid up one day and was *returning* to the islands on Wednesday. It was an island boat, not the regular boat from the mainland.

In the midst of my uneasy meditations Odollee spoke as if coming out of a dream. "I have met you before. And yet I have not seen you. It sounds silly, but I can't get it out of my mind. It's not a chance likeness because it is your manner more than your face that seems so—intimately known to me, yet so vague I can't replace you."

The handsome dark face of the man was suddenly suffused with color. He laughed with evident embarrassment. "I'm afraid not. I shouldn't have forgotten you. I am positive I never saw you before yesterday. Positive," he added. His luminous gaze held her in a steady, almost hypnotic regard. Her eyes fell, but I felt that she was troubled and unconvinced.

He called out: "Lunch is ready." The old man rose, hesitated, looking at the woman, who remained seated. She shook her head and they came in. The Pirate went out to her but came back alone.

"She doesn't want anything," he said.

"Poor devil," murmured Evil Eyes.

"And yet she's one of the most brilliant women I ever knew," said the young man.

We began eating in a peculiarly pregnant silence. I wondered why Evil Eyes had said "Poor devil." And why had the Pirate prefaced a high compliment with "and yet?"

She got up and moved out of range of our vision. As the boat was small I knew she must be uncomfortably near the edge of the narrow deck.

Something in this action as if she were perhaps sensitive over her conspicuousness, her failure to partake of the fine and bountiful lunch she had herself provided, touched me.

I felt that I had perhaps wronged her in my mind. Might it not be that some deep and ugly hurt lay behind her aloofness? The repulsion I had felt might well be the repulsion of youth for whatever is sad or painful.

I fixed a chicken sandwich, poured a glass of wine and took them out to her without saying anything to them.

"Oh I say, Miss——" began the Pirate in a tone of protest. But I had already mounted the three steps to the deck. And whatever he might have said or wanted to say was lost in the appalling sight that met me.

HIDDEN by the cabin wall near the deck's edge the woman was on her knees, her voluminous skirts billowing about her, gloves off, veil thrown back, her long, claw-like hands searching frantically the several pockets of her purse, its contents scattered on the deck: a small notebook, a roll of bills, a bottle containing a pale liquid which might have been medicine or perfume, a man's knife and what looked like a snuff-box.

She turned the purse upside-down, shook it, threw it down, caught up the roll of bills, tore them open, flinging them down like loose paper to be swept from the deck by the breeze. They drifted singly and in bunches into the river. Paying no attention to them, she was going through her purse again.

With a gesture of rage she cast it from her, stood up and grasping her skirt on the side drew a writing pad and pencil from her pocket, dropped them, turning the pocket inside-out.

Then she clapped her hands to her flat bosom, paused breathlessly and a look of triumph dawning in her hitherto panic-ridden face, breathed: "Ah!"

Then she saw me.

Her hands still clutching at her breast, she turned on me, crouching as if about to spring upon me, holding me in shocked stupefaction.

An old face, it was also a dead face on which I looked, the eyes alone living, eyes so black that they might have been sightless, yet were fiercely alive, fighting decay.

Her countenance was hawk-like, nobly proportioned but gaunt in its terrible emaciation. Her hair, worn short, was snow white. A generous mouth suggested sweetness gone dry.

But amazing as had been her action, and as her face was, the expression stunned me. I had a swift impression of the cornered fear and savagery of an animal, followed so quickly by a look of rage that was not afraid but boldly menacing, that I could never afterward be certain of that first impression. Then as suddenly the black eyes were cold, insolent, inquiring as if to say: "Well, what can I do for you?"

She lifted her hand, dropped the veil over her face and I awoke from the hypnosis of that face. My eyes strayed foolishly to those bills bobbing in widening distance on the disturbed water. I retreated to the cabin.

EVERYBODY looked at me curiously. They knew I had never taken that last step to the deck, that I had stood there like a dolt and returned without offering the sandwich and wine to the woman.

My face must have told them more than this. But nobody asked me what had stopped me so abruptly. Nor why I made such poor pretense of eating.

I was too shocked over what I'd just seen, too worried over my discovery concerning the boat to feel like chattering with a host who had hustled us onto his launch blindly. I recollected seeing a larger boat docked nearer the railroad—without doubt that was the one we should have taken.

We had refused to accept Mr. Squareman's offer to send us away in his taxi attended by his driver—and then we had been carried away in the wrong boat. What did it mean?

I, who had traveled, who knew the world, had been asked to accompany an inexperienced girl to her home, and I had apparently let her and myself

be kidnapped by a stranger whose companions talked about being "Locked up——" And "Dead men make no music——"

But why had we been taken like this? Where were we going? What object? Nobody had anything to gain by kidnapping me, certainly. No ransom would be offered—but what of Odollee?

I recalled the mystery of her life these fifteen years, the silence of the nuns, their evident surprise and reluctance over my coming with her.

Her shocked expression when I had asked her in sheer facetiousness if she had a jewel of great price to account for the surveillance which attended us. Her uneasiness that night!

Who indeed was Odollee? What did I really know of this girl whom I had followed into the void? What did any of us know concerning the mystery that had always surrounded her?

As if all this were not enough, there was that woman. What meant that amazing scene? What was she looking for so wildly? What was so important that she had not noticed nor cared for the loss of all that money, and had brought forth that triumphant breath when she evidently found it in her bosom?

And how quickly she had recovered her self-control! Her insolent poise! There was something ugly in all this —something terrifying. From the first I had felt that there was something furtive, if not downright treacherous about her.

Oddly, though suspicious of the men, they didn't repel me as she had, I *thought* ugly things about them based partly on the villainous looks of the old ones, partly on the action of the young one in getting us on this boat; but I had *felt* things about her, unnamable things. I *might* be mistaken about them, but I wasn't about her.

And she had brought that hamper of food. She belonged with them.

CHAPTER VII

WHAT PLACE IS THIS?

LUNCHEON over, the men went back on deck and the sullen young Creole cleaned away the débris, carrying the hamper forward where he and the captain ate, the captain keeping a hand on the wheel and his eyes ahead.

The flat black ooze had now fallen completely away. The golden void swallowed us—a trembling, dizzying void where form and color merged into nothingness.

The sun hung like a wheel of brass in a sky all blue, yet seeming to reflect the green water. And the sea, all green, reflected the blue of the sky, so that sea and sky took on the aspect each of the other, and the eye could scarcely distinguish where the one began or the other ended.

No outline, no horizon. In all this brilliant immensity no image was reflected save immensity's phosphorescent lights.

Beyond us lay a vastitude which offered no resistance to our passage, about us were colors of no shade that could be named.

I did not impart to Odollee my discovery concerning the boat. What did it matter? We were here, atoms in space—at the mercy of whatever gods there were.

"What's wrong, Jackie?" Odollee's voice seemed to come from a long way.

"Not a thing," I said. "Just enjoying the scenery."

"Your face didn't express enjoyment. You looked like a conscience-ridden sleep walker. I've been watching you for some time."

Darn an expressive countenance!

But also thanks to training in expression and quick thinking, I summoned a glad smile: "I was trying to recall Lady Macbeth's sleep-walking scene."

She laughed. "Well, you had the look all right."

"Thanks! Oh, look! Land!"

A tangle of green had suddenly emerged from the water. And the sight of tangible life rising out of the void caught me up from the depths. Hope soared forth to meet a familiar sign. Perhaps here was a chance to get Odollee and myself out of this situation. I thought of asking to be put off but decided that would be foolish. If these men had, for sinister reasons, put us on this boat, they would not let us go upon our demand. Furthermore, it now appeared that this first island was an uninhabited jungle.

We passed it.

And now islands began popping out of the water with varying frequency.

THE sun was still high above the water when we sighted two islands lying close together. Having no faith in the captain I, nevertheless, asked him how long before we would reach Meynard Isle.

"Thass Meynard Isle," he said, pointing as it seemed to both the islands.

"Which one?"

"Bof same. De Gulf she git mad and split 'em open, thass so, yes. You go Meynard Isle or Le Petit mebby?"

"Meynard Isle," said Odollee.

"Do you stop at both?" I asked.

"No, Meynard, she las' stop. Nobody they go fo' Le Petit today. Madame Gerodes, she live on him but she no go today. Le Petit she nice place. Got big hotel *et petit* cottage houses fo' plaisure."

"You don't go any further today?" I asked, thinking of our fellow passengers.

"No, no further today and nex' day and no time," he grinned. "Thass las' islan'. After him coom no mo'."

The last island. Then they too were going to—well, Last Island. They had come with us to land's end. The woman, Madame Gerodes he had called her, lived on the other island but she too was to go with us to the end of our journey.

I stood beside the captain, my back toward Odollee, no longer able to sit down, afraid to let her see my face.

ABOUT a half mile from shore the boat grounded. A skiff came out to meet us, a young man at the oars. Two dump carts stood several hundred feet from shore in the shallow water.

Odollee and I, together with our baggage and that strange woman, were hustled into the skiff; the men remained on board. Some distance from the launch the skiff grounded. Whereupon, one of the dump-carts came out to meet the skiff.

A freckle-faced, sandy-haired boy of about fifteen sat on a board across the front of the cart. "Whoa!" he called, backing almost into the skiff. Then turning to us: "Well, hop in." I didn't care for the dump-carts, but the only alternative was to "hop" out into the water.

The boatman steadied the boat as the three of us climbed into the cart. It tilted backward on its two wheels as if determined to fling us into the water.

Nowhere was there any sign of an anxious father.

The freckle-faced boy, adjusting another board across the top of the cart, invited us to "set." The woman sat in front with the boy. My trunk and our hand baggage was piled behind us. Odollee's trunk was put on the other cart. The boy slapped the imperturbable mule with the reins, crying "Gid ap, Betty."

BEFORE us lay the wildest stretch of land imaginable. Tall reeds growing out of stagnant pools. Ponds connecting with one another by narrow streams, or dwindling into a waste of sea grass. Mud flats stretching away and away in terrible nakedness toward a dark forest on the south.

Not a man, woman or child in sight. No cattle grazing in the distance. No sign of civilized life. Here was indeed Land's End.

Presently, without a word, the woman caught the reins, stopped the mule and, grasping the high wheel with one hand, vaulted over it with the same surprising agility she had displayed in catching the train.

She lifted her hand to us in the first sign of recognition she had shown us, and struck off along a foot path which led through the marsh toward the south and directly away from the wagon road.

"She must be goin' to the big house," mused the boy. "Gid ap, Betty." We lumbered into motion.

After a space he said: "She's a queer one. Don't speak to anybody."

"You know her?" I asked.

"Never seen her before. Don't keer ef I never see her again."

I looked furtively at Odollee. She had not spoken throughout our primitive landing. No word of surprise concerning her father's failure to meet her. Not a question.

Remote, inscrutable, there was about her an air of detachment and indifference, of patient waiting; a fatalistic acceptance of our situation which was wholly incompatible with the high-strung emotional temperament of the Creole.

I was disturbed by a sense of great age in her as if she had been centuries old before my first ancestor, my race, was born. It was not the first time that she had affected me like this, dimly.

Now all at once the feeling was definite, active. It took form in a suspicion of her and all that related to her account of herself.

If she were what she said, why had she been so secretive all these years? The Meynards, though eccentric, were known to be fabulously wealthy and respected; one of the great old families of the early Louisiana territory.

Why had they taken so little notice of her in all these years? Why had she preserved her secret to the very end, if it were an innocent secret?

"Tell none of the girls where you are going. The Sisters, yes, but no one else."

Her words, to which I in my eager excitement had attached no importance, were all at once significant, full of latent meaning.

"ODOLLEE, did we come here to see your father?" I asked sharply.

"Of course." Her voice was calm. She did not turn from her contemplation of the road.

"Then where is he?"

"You'll see in good time."

"Well, I think a good time would have been for him to have met us at the landing, if you can call it that."

"You wish to turn back?" Still she did not look at me.

"How turn back? The boat we came out on is not the regular boat which will return tomorow, but a private boat owned by one of those men, and it will stay here till he is ready to send it back." I was on the verge of hysteria.

To my surprise she turned blazing eyes on me. "How do you know that?"

I repeated the handsome Pirate's words of possession and command. Also that I'd discovered the boat had not left the mainland to return next day, but had left the islands to re-

turn to them. Her amazing anger increased.

"It was the right boat. The right boat, I say. Please if you can't be sensible do not speak to me."

I, too, was angry now and determined to go no further blindfolded.

"Boy," I said, "where are you taking us?"

"Where you wanter go?" he asked calmly. "Wusn't you 'lowin' to go to the big house?"

"I was 'lowin' to go to Stone Gables on Meynard Isle," I retorted.

"Is that whut they call the big house—Stone Gables?" he asked, flecking the mule with the whip.

"Don't you know what it's called? Weren't you sent to fetch us?"

"Reckon so. Come fo' passengers from the *Vale* but ah thought the passengers wus men folks. Old Sanchez sent me to meet the boat."

"Where is the house?" I asked.

THE BOY lifted a grimy hand and pointed to a distant dark forest looming against the sky on the South and West.

At first I discerned what appeared to be the head of a marble shaft gleaming snow white in the westing sunlight. And further on, in the direction Mrs. Gerodes had taken, taller than the monument and contrastingly dark, appeared what I took to be the tower of a lighthouse.

And gazing at the stark uprightness of tower and monument I had an odd impression that the forest did not stand straight up, but leaned grievously toward us like soldiers disorganized, fleeing shamefully from some terror in close pursuit.

Never had I seen a forest line like that. The treetops, usually so individual in their proud lift, here reminded me of the rice fields downbent by the wind into flowing formlessness. The effect was at once strange and disturbing.

"The house air 'bout a mile off as the crow flies," the boy was saying, "but the road air so windin' that hit's a good three mile to go from where we air now.

"Ah reckon the big house wus built fo' Naw 'Leans wus. That's how come she faces to the South clar acrosst the island from the landin'."

"Who is old Sanchez," I asked, "the one who sent you to meet the boat?"

"Oh, jest a Malay nigger. Kind of head servant. Turrible grouch. Some say she over a hundred year old. The niggers say she ain't got no age—that she the devil an' never wus born an' ain't never gwinter die. Reckon hit's so."

"Do you know if this is Meynard Isle?" I persisted.

He turned to look back at me. "Don't you know? You come to hit."

"Yes, I've come to it but I don't know if it's the island or not."

"Hit's hit all right," he grinned. "But hit's funny you didn't know hit."

Odollee gave me a scornful look.

Presently Odollee spoke. "This Malay woman sent you to meet some friends of Mr. Meynard's friends who were coming on the boat, perhaps? Didn't Mr. Meynard——"

Ah, so she was not so certain as she appeared. Not indifferent. Her voice held a note of sharpness.

"Well, now, I wouldn't swear she said friends o' his'n; but Mr. John is summers on business, and maybe I sorter took it that's who she wus espectin'.

"She jest told me to meet the boat. She never tells you no more'n she has to. Joe Tobias tole me las' night that Mister John is summers down in St. Landry Parish and t'other is over on Le Petit Meynard. Joe says the young gentleman is mostly in Naw 'Leans or sume'ers. Joe talks to me a heap 'cause he thinks I'm Irish."

He informed us that he was called Mickey. He was not Irish as one might suppose by his name and snub nose, but Creole French; though he didn't talk like one, he added boastfully. He learned to speak good English from a Red-bone on Grand Isle. All his folks spoke very broken English. Or maybe just French.

Odollee asked nothing further and Mickey talked on and on. Certainly in the inexhaustible flow of his conversation he was Creole.

I felt that it was not my business to quiz the boy, but I lacked Odollee's control.

"Does Mr. Pierre Meynard spend much time at home, or is he like the young gentlemen, mostly away?" I asked, wondering who the young gentlemen were — and if Odollee knew.

Mickey gave me a sidelong look. "Well, you see hit's this a-way: Ah ain't been wo'kin' on Meynard Isle but little better'n a week an' Ah don't know much about the fambly, only what Ah hear the hands gassin' 'bout. Ah come from Grand Isle—run away. Paw didn't pay me no wages."

CHAPTER VIII

THE SCORPION UNDER THE BARK.

WE plunged into a mangrove forest. The trees were enormous, their roots reaching high above the ground, interlacing, piling upon one another like millions of monstrous reptiles swept together, stacking themselves in hideous, writhing battle and petrifying in their nauseous conglomeration.

Even the coarse sea-grass had retreated as had all undegrowth, the trees rising in giant splendor above the reptilian cemetery.

No light penetrated the gloom. And to my surprise I found that my first odd impression of fleeing soldiers was more than fancy. Every tree leaned to the north. And all about was a ghostly whispering as if to warn us of terrors beyond.

Then quite abruptly we came upon the sea. The forest ended as sharply as it had begun.

"Now you kin see the tower good," said the boy, pointing toward the dark monument etched against the sky.

I noted also the tall white marble shaft set back among the trees. Must be a graveyard, I thought. But how did they ever get into the jungle to start one?

"They's allus a light in the tower o' nights an' dark days," Mickey continued informatively. "Never goes out. Sailors watch fo' hit way out to sea.

"Two of the old boys fit a duel up there, they say. One kilt t'other an' then kilt hiss'ef or somethin' like that. The niggers tell all kinds o' tales—say the house is ha'nted.

"Ah know one man, white man too, says he seen the ghost. His name's Joe Tobias."

"The ghost's name?" I asked.

"No'm, that's the gardener's name what seen the ghost. They do say the ghost plays opery music o' nights in the treetops 'round the tower. But Ah ain't hearn hit yit. An' whut's more Ah don't wanter."

He had turned and was driving due east. There was no road, merely the long white beach against which the Gulf lashed in dreary repetition.

Presently we saw a high brick wall surrounding a massive house and what appeared to be enormous grounds over-run by the jungle. And here, too, every tree leaned to the north.

Vines grew rampant in the furtivity of the impenetrable gloom. They smothered the irregular walls, climbing the trees, hanging in dismal draperies from burdened limbs.

"Whoa, Betty." Mickey drew the lines over the mule's back and opened the high iron gate. It dragged over the big stones of the walk. "This here's the front gate," he said. "They's another gate 'round to the side, but I 'low this 'ere's where comp'ny goes in. I'll take your truck 'round to t'other side."

We made no move and he cheerfully ordered us to hop out.

"Jest ring the bell," he said. "An' don't git in a hurry. Old Sanchez nur the China boy won't hurry for nobody."

He clattered away, leaving us in the walk, staring up at the most forbidding house I'd ever seen.

Two and a half stories high and covering a vast area, the house was built of discolored cement and coral rock which had, no doubt, once been a lovely glistening white, but was now a pock-marked black. The front was spanned by a single veranda of cobble-stones rising less than two inches above the soggy ground. Huge colonnades supported the roof with its queer gables and dormer windows.

In the very centre of the gabled roof the tower lifted. It was circular, built of bricks, and had square holes cut here and there at irregular intervals. Near the top was what appeared to be a square room with one window, the extreme top being rectangular and enclosed in glass like an immense lantern.

But the whole place had a damp, unclean appearance like an old rock in the sea to which lecherous tissues cling.

"THIS may have been a house where people lived once," I said with a shiver of apprehension, "but I take it they must have died a hundred years ago. Look at this walk."

As if in comfirmation of my words there came from directly over my head a mournful hoo-hoo-ing.

"An owl," I gasped. "An owl's cry in the daytime means death!"

Odollee laughed. "It's so dark in here he probably thinks it's night."

"No matter. It's a sure sign of death."

"Will you stop?"

She went resolutely up the walk, I following.

On the cobbled veranda we paused before a heavy batten door. Iron hinges, heavy with rust, sprawled across half its width and were augmented by iron bands at top and bottom.

Glancing up, past the second story, marked only by its line of square dead eyes in the flat wall, I discerned in one of the shadowy recesses of the arched roof what appeared to be a church or plantation bell with a huge clapper. From it a rope hung within easy reach of even so small a person as myself.

"That must be the doorbell!" I said, and gave the rope a yank.

Never in my life did I dream that one yank on a bell rope could set up such a bedlam of noise. The thing let out one hideous clang, turned clean over, then swung back and forth, back and forth, bellowing at every swing. I caught the rope in an effort to stop it—and it started all over.

THERE was a scraping of a lifted sash over our heads, two little blinds flew open, and through one of the upper windows a gaunt brown face under a red turban emerged.

A man's face, and a woman's shoulders, if the bright calico covering counted for anything. An old face, set with baleful black eyes. The bony structure of her face was large, regular and protuberant, unlike the voluptuous features of the negro; her mouth was thin and cruel. Huge hoop earrings of brass or dull gold dangled from her ears.

A harsh voice screamed at us in a foreign tongue. Then, breaking off in the middle of her tirade, she leaned further out. She glared at us a moment, then the savage face underwent an astonishing change.

Her mouth widened, exposing black, broken teeth. The baleful eyes disappeared in a mask of wrinkles and she cried out in broken English:

"Ha! I no espec' das you. I no espec' we get you today." She disappeared, the blinds slammed, and the sash descended.

"Heavens!" I said. "What was it, man or woman? And what language was that she yelled in?"

"Spanish."

"A pleasant old party," I commented nervously. "I hope the entire household doesn't wear hoop earrings and speak Spanish."

"What have the ear-rings to do with it?" demanded Odollee.

After a considerable wait there was a scraping as of a heavy latch, a creaking, and the unwieldy door swung wide, revealing the turbaned savage who had shouted at us from the window. She had the flat, square body of a man and gave one a sense of tremendous strength.

A talon-like hand reached out and, grasping Odollee by the wrist, drew her into the gloom within. The action was so quick, so unexpected, that Odollee stumbled. I followed her precipitously.

We now found ourselves in an enormous hall, with vaulted roof, the paneled walls almost covered with queer guns and swords, strange stuffed fish, and clubs suspended between deer heads.

The furnishings were of black walnut, the cobbled floor was strewn with the skins of many beautiful animals.

And a perfectly enormous stairway was set in the middle of the back wall. About half-way up two narrow stairways branched to right and left from a small octagonal mezzanine overlooking the main hall.

Paying not the slightest attention to me, the creature was pulling Odollee along toward the upper end of the hall. "De boat she spring leak las' week an' we no espec' you today. Mais yo' coom on de *Va'*, eh?"

"Yes. We were told it was the right boat," said Odollee.

"Is this Stone Gables?"

"Dis de place."

"Then where's Father?"

The woman stopped short. "Who on de boat?"

"I didn't know them. Three men and a woman," Odollee said impatiently.

"Tall woman? Nice dress? W'at de woman look lac'?"

"Yes, tall. I don't know what she looked like. She had on a veil. You say my father knew the regular boat was laid up and didn't expect me today? But he's here, isn't he?"

AGAIN the hideous old face was distorted working in hideous mirth, the wrinkles shifting, increasing, till there appeared not a smooth space from turban to chin. Her eyes were almost blotted out.

"Coom. I fine fo' you. He here. Somewhere. Mebby, so coom in now. I fine." Once more she turned toward the upper end of the hall, chuckling. "De *Va'*. Dass good."

She fell to muttering gleefully in some heathenish tongue which I knew was neither Spanish nor French.

I heard the front door swing shut and, turning, saw a little pigtailed Chinaman in a black satin coat and civilized trousers who had materialized out of the shadows. He smiled vapidly at me. I did not return his smile.

A mental paralysis swept over me. Everything was unreal. Odollee and the old woman disappearing through

a door at the entrance of which stood a suit of armor inlaid with silver. One hand grasped a sword, and the socketless eyes seemed to watch us malevolently. I followed sheep-like.

Though it was quite warm outdoors, a chill hung, fog-like, over the room into which I followed Odollee and the old woman. There were two large fireplaces. A fire was burning in the one at the far end of the room nearest the stairway where we entered. But its cheerful blaze merely succeeded in throwing the vast chamber into a deeper gloom.

There was a quality in that room, an undefinable something like the strange feeling one gets in darkness and solitude of a lurking presence.

Embodied mysteries, evil secrets, and impish thoughts seemed watching us from out of dark corners.

The hangings were of a dark greenish-brown color, and I had a distinct impression that the portieres over one of the doors parted ever so slightly, then dropped instantly together.

The old woman paused in front of the fire and motioned to a small settee of black carved wood and brocade drawn within the arc of the firelight, whereupon she bent to poke the fire. In the firelight, her gaunt figure and bizarre dress with hoop earrings flapping against her brown cheeks looked curiously savage.

"De *Va!* Dass good. Dass good. Who tole you come on de *Va'*?"

"A young man. One of the passengers. He was on the train with us. He asked us if we were coming to the islands. Showed us the boat and put our things on."

Odollee spoke in short, staccato sentences.

Her hands were clutched in her lap, eyes darting about as if expecting to see her father emerge from the shadows. She had automatically obeyed the old woman's invitation to sit down.

I tried to persuade myself that the spectral appearance of this room was in my own mind and not in fact; but I could not rid my heart of a sickening smother of depression. We were expected—if not on the *Vale*, at least as soon as the regular boat came out.

Then we were not lost. Odollee's father had not met her—naturally. But why was it so strange that we had come on the *Vale?* Why not, if the boat *belonged* here? Why, indeed, had it not been *sent* for us in the first place?

Odollee sprang up, opened her mouth, but no sound emerged from her pale lips.

"Wait. I see. He here by now." The old woman spoke sharply, like one giving a command and with a strange look at Odollee as of warning, she left us abruptly.

Odollee bent to the blaze, her slender form shivering. I, too, felt the cold of this tomb-like room. Also I was swept by a tremendous pity. What a home-coming, after years of banishment! What must she be feeling?

I HAD not accepted a seat and, moved by no impulse that I could name, other than nervousness or idleness, I strolled toward the door through which the woman had disappeared into the hall.

She was trudging up the broad stair when suddenly she was arrested by a sound like the loud snapping of fingers. She looked down probably toward a door opening into the room immediately behind the one we were in. Her face was contorted by her hideous smile, she nodded her head violently, put a warning finger to her lips, then made several motions as if to command some one to get back out of sight.

The entire pantomime was as

clear as it was surprising. Then she came running down the stairs with an agility that belied her years.

In direct line with the stair, I was nevertheless well within the room. I stepped quickly out of range of her vision. She passed our door without looking in.

Now what was this? I stood thinking. Odollee was pacing about. I was disinclined to further upset her. Those portieres! I'd thought they moved while the old woman was in the room with us. I now knew they had.

Someone had been there, had heard us talking, and had stepped out as the old woman started upstairs. Some one who had *snapped* his or her fingers to avoid calling.

I had to know who was in that back room. To avoid attracting Odollee's attention I crossed not too swiftly to the door as if to look more closely perhaps at the drapes. I parted them with a quick movement —and saw Mrs. Gerodes!

She was without hat and gloves, like one at home and was just passing into what must have been still another room. Her back was toward me, but there was no mistaking that back, that fantastic dress. The black woman followed her, apparently shaking with glee.

I DROPPED the curtains together and went back and sat before the fire. All this was too much for me.

Soon enough we would know all about it. We were here. Whatever lay in that fact was inevitable.

My head ached dully. Mind refused to function—grew blank. But instead of feeling an atom imprisoned in immensity, I now had a sense of terrifying restriction; rather as if we had been snatched from space into a net from which we could not escape and must surely, perhaps slowly, smother.

Accustomed to being alone at night in the vicious neighborhoods of great cities, of meeting sinister-faced characters, of seeking out the dark alleyway of stage doors, I had never known fear. But here was something more than met the eye. Something more than the physical dangers of crime emblazoned daily in the newspapers. Something under the surface, like a torpid scorpion hidden beneath the bark of an old log on which one sits unawarily.

I WAS not surprised when the old woman returned to us alone. Indeed I had already in some inexplicable way seen her return.

"No fine yo' Pa on tel'phone. You coom. I sho' room an' you see heem bymby."

The woman led us once more into the hall with its countless evidences of forest murders on floor and walls, and up the grand staircase.

Several steps behind her and Odollee, I paused involuntarily on the octagon-shaped landing and, turning to glance down into the cavern below, saw a man come from under the stairway.

He was tall, broad-shouldered, and walked with a buoyant stride. There was something familiar about his back.

As he reached the armor standing by the drawing-room entrance, he stopped to adjust the sword, which hung at a dizzy angle. His profile was now turned to me and I recognized the Pirate of the *Vale*.

The man glanced up and saw me on the broad stair landing and a look of surprise or annoyance, I could not tell which, crossed his expressive dark face.

He had the sword in his hand and looked more than ever like a pirate. The friendliness of his eyes, which had been so marked on the train, was

absent, and his features appeared sharper than I had previously thought them.

"More like a hawk than an eagle," I thought.

Not a smile, not even a sign that he had ever seen me before. Just a blank glitter of dark eyes. I had thought them brown. I now saw they were black. The whole character of the man had undergone a curious and alarming change.

"Well," I said with attempted bravado, "what are you going to do with the sword? Murder us or the mosquitoes?"

"I beg your pardon?" His voice was cold, slightly metallic. No answering smile at recollection of our train ride.

I turned and fled up the stairs.

Odollee had stopped at the far end of a long high-ceilinged corridor. "Come on, Jackie!"

THE upper story, from what I could see of tall black doors, surmounted by fan-shaped transoms, dark walls, many corridors, and heavy window casings at each end of the main hall, was as unprepossessing as the lower.

The old woman turned into a narrow corridor and began mounting a spiral stair. I saw Odollee hesitate, then follow, as if to say: "Well, what else is there to do?"

I was now close behind her. I wanted to speak to her, tell her all I'd seen. I no longer thought of her perturbation. But my throat was closed tight. I could scarcely breathe.

We came out on a flat roof. On the south, facing the sea, stood the tower. To right and left of it a gabled half-story rose covering about one-fourth of the area of the roof across the front and extending in a long ell along the west.

The ell descended about midway to a low roof like a succession of chicken coops and beehives, then once more ascended to a half-story on the north. Thus a patio was formed by the turrets and gables and rooms.

A low stone parapet enclosed the fourth side. I took it all in, in the painful minuteness of a mind in abeyance to the emotions.

Opening the low door of the gabled apartment on the north, the woman said: "Yo' room here. Nices' place in house. Fix up mo' new."

A wide and long room with low ceilings and high windows set in heavy casements, it was beautifully and modernly furnished as a sitting room with easy chairs, taboret and fancy oil lamps. There was a long divan drawn up cat-a-cornered before the fireplace. A fire was laid.

The grim old woman touched a match to the paper and pine splinters beneath the wood and a quick blaze sprang up.

The sun had not yet set, but there was a heavy breeze blowing from the Gulf, which together with the dampness rising from ground, never dry, and the tomb-like atmosphere of the house, made me grateful for the fire as well for the bright cretonnes which hung at the little square windows.

"I sen' up yo' trunk, an' you' dress fo' dinnah," said the woman as she rose from the hearth. "Big bell, he ring w'en dinnah she ready."

"When will I see my father?" asked Odollee. She spoke very low.

"Bymby. He got business some place. No fin' on tel'phone. Doan be scart. Yo' see plen' time."

She went out, closing the door with a snap. I ran to open it.

She had stopped half-way across the patio and her face was distorted by hideous mirth, as though she knew I had expected to find the door locked.

CHAPTER IX

AN AMAZING DISCOVERY

GUESS they know there's no use in locking us in," I said, slamming the door. "If we tried to run away there's nowhere to go."

Odollee sank on the divan, leaning toward the fire, elbows on knees, her face between her hands.

"Odollee," I said without regard to grammar, "do you know where you're at? Tell me that. I won't ask another question, but I've got to know if you're wise to all this funny business."

She lifted her head and stared at me with blank eyes. "I know nothing. My father sent for me. I am here."

"My God!" I cried. "Yes, you're here, and I'm here. But is this your father's home? And where *is* he?"

"The woman said he was out somewhere. He did not expect me today, on account of the boat. It must be the place. She knew me. Said I was expected next week."

"But what about the *Vale?* Why didn't he expect you on that? It was expected today. Mickey went to meet it. The boat *belongs* here. And those men belong here. Why didn't they know you were expected? And if they did, why didn't they make themselves known?"

"How do you know they belong here?"

"They are all here. This minute. That woman. The man who put us on the boat. All of them."

In one outburst I told her all I'd seen. Her handsome eagle, who all at once looked like a hawk, coming out from under the stair and adjusting the furnishings. That I addressed him and he looked and acted as if he'd never seen me before.

The warning signals of the negress to the veiled woman.

"There's something phoney about all this," I said. "It's my belief we have been kidnaped and are on the wrong island. We have only the captain's word that this is Meynard Isle. And he is in their employ."

"Mais c'est impossible!"

"You know I don't speak French," I stormed, beside myself with fear.

"What with Spanish and Chinese and heathen languages in this house you had better stick to English. Why didn't they tell us that was their boat? And if they belong here—that is, if this is Meynard Isle and your father's house, they must have heard of you—some description, and that you were expected with a girl friend this week.

"And how did those men get here so quickly? We left them on the boat. The skiff had to go back for them and the dump-cart meet the skiff. And there wasn't any automobile waiting. It couldn't have gotten anywhere over those roads if there had been.

"They must have known a short-cut through the marsh. The one the woman took. I tell you they *belong* here. And we *don't.* I feel it."

"We have Mickey's word that this is Meynard Isle and Meynard House," said Odollee. "He doesn't look like a bad boy."

"That's so," I said with faint relief. "If ever I saw a kind, talkative boy, Mickey is one. But he admitted he'd been here only a week. And he talked about one of the old boys killing another in the tower, and ghosts, and an old Malay nigger who was a devil."

Odollee stood up sharply. "That tower. It is outside. My father—why is he not here?"

I saw in her unstrung state she had connected Mickey's story with her father's absence. "He said that was a long time ago. They fought a

duel. That couldn't have been your father."

She sat down again. "No."

"Odollee," I said, "actor folk care less, I guess, than anybody in the world about people's private affairs. I've never tried to pry into yours. I took you as I found you and I never expected to quiz you, but I've taken you so completely at your own word about all this business of coming to spend the summer with your father. I've asked no questions. Don't you think, in view of what we've found here, or haven't found, you ought to tell me something about yourself if you know anything?"

SHE stared silently into the fire. Her sombre eyes were luminous in the reflected light. The heavy bands folded about her head like a yellow turban, her still face suggested a race unknown to me and disturbingly remote.

"Yes," she said, after a long moment, "you should know all I know, but it is so appallingly little."

She opened her purse, which was one of those trunk-like affairs with a big mirror in the lid. It was quite a large one and she took from it two letters and a small black box.

"I should tell you," she began, "that until a few weeks ago I thought myself an orphan. One day Mother sent for me to come to her room and she told me all about my coming to the convent.

"When I was three years old a Malay woman brought me. From Mother's description I think it might have been the same one who let us in just now.

"She told Mother that my mother was dead and that my father was abroad. She was an old family servant and he had sent me to her to place in St. Cecilia's Convent. He wanted to leave me with the Sisters to raise and educate.

"A sum of money had been deposited with a New York bank for me and a thousand dollars would be sent to St. Cecilia's Convent every six months until I would be eighteen. If, in the meantime, anything happened to me, Mother was to notify the bank. The letter the Malay woman brought confirmed her story."

She paused and, sighing deeply, continued without looking at me.

"I lied to you, Jackie, when I told you my father wrote me. He never wrote. I was ashamed to have you know that my father had neglected me—that is, in this way.

"The letter to Mother said my father, if still living, would call for me when I would be eighteen. But I was not to know this.

"I would not miss a father if I did not know I had one. But, ah, I did! I did! With all the other girls getting letters and having fathers and mothers to visit them, it——"

She broke off with a slight shrug and a little gesture with both hands, palms up, as if to cast such thoughts away. Then:

"No matter about that. The Malay woman said I was heiress to a great fortune.

"A great wrong had been done my father, and not till that wrong had been righted could he claim me. She said further that there were those who, if they could learn where I was, would try to claim me and would not hesitate to make away with me. For this reason neither she nor my father dared come near the convent until he would be ready to take me away."

OPENING a little black box which she took from her purse, she brought out a man's ring of old and curious workmanship.

The open mouths of two serpents formed the mounting for a large and exceedingly beautiful topaz. In the center and deep in the heart of the

topaz was a black horizontal streak, like the sight in a cat's eyes. Indeed, the stone was remarkably like a cat's eye caught between the jaws of the serpents, gleaming in petrified malignity.

It was a beautiful ring, yet sinister in its beauty.

"The woman gave this to Mother to keep for me, then showed her an exact imitation of it," continued Odollee. "Exact in workmanship with the black cat-sight in the center, but the stone was dull, having none of the fine lustre of the real stone.

"Whoever called for me would bring this ring, together with an exact duplicate of the letter to Mother. Whereupon, Mother was to give me the genuine ring to use as directed by the messenger who brought the proper credentials. I would know by the duplicate ring and letter that the bearer was my father, or at least his messenger, and had a right to take me away. 'Deliver her to no one else,' said the letter.

"It gave my name and age and said I was Spanish. I was to be taught English, French and Spanish.

"The odd thing, Mother said, was that I spoke French fluently for a child of that age, and knew a great many words and phrases of a language which was utterly foreign to her.

"I spoke not one word of Spanish or English.

"My clothes were of the finest, all made by renowned houses. Some bore the names of French houses. Others were from Rome, Vienna, Naples, everywhere but America.

"The Malay woman enjoined Mother to the utmost secrecy and care and seemed to be in great fear that someone else would try to gain possession of me.

"She left me and never came again. Nor did Mother ever have a word further, except through the New York bank which every six months sent my remittances. And beautiful things came for my room during the first five years.

"Then at last, true to the promise in the letter, I was called for with proper credentials and full instructions about what I was to do. I have done as directed. Now that you know all I know, Jackie, what do you make of it?"

"Not a thing," I said. "But this much I do know—if you had told me all this before we left the convent, I'd have told you to write that New York bank for some dope on the man who created that fund for you. And if they hadn't known any more than the Mother Superior did, I would never have left New Orleans with you till a detective took this trip first."

She looked at me in surprise. "How practical you are, Jackie! And you look so like a child!"

"Because I'm little and fair. But I've knocked about the world since I was a baby, and I know more about life than all the Sisters in St. Cecilia's will ever know. Still, it does look as if Mother would have thought of trying to get some sort of information about this business."

"Why should she? The one who put me there had a right to take me away!"

"Did the letter and ring come by mail?"

"No; by messenger."

"The old woman?"

"No. A Chinaman brought them. He said my father had sent him. Further than that he knew nothing. But there were the ring and duplicate letter, together with another enclosing money and telling me what to do, even when to come.

"A stone might have been duplicated, but not a letter written fifteen years ago—the identical handwriting, the exact words. And it was a long letter."

A Chinaman! "Odollee," I said, "there's a Chinaman downstairs; and there was that Chinaman——"

She sighed. "There are plenty of Chinamen." Then: "The letter said my father would be waiting for me on Meynard Isle."

I WAS not greatly relieved by what she had told me. In putting Odollee in the convent great precaution had been taken by her father against someone else claiming her—"who wouldn't hesitate to make away with her."

Had he, after all, been outwitted? But there was the old woman who answered Mother's description. There couldn't be two such creatures. She was unique, unmistakable.

Odollee took two letters from their envelopes and passed them to me. They were written in French and I could read only the signature, which was *Pierre Meynard.* But it seemed to me that, though strikingly alike, the letters were *not the same.*

The earlier one was more like script—the later one was bolder, yet having a tremulousness of line which denoted hesitating care.

The more I studied them, the more I was convinced that the same hand had not written both letters.

The sun now being quite low behind the trees beyond our windows, it was growing dark in the room; though, through the half-turned shutters I could see that it was still quite light outside. I went to open the shutters. I must make sure before I frightened Odollee with my hideous conviction.

DRAWING the inner curtains aside, I looked for the latch. There was none. The seam in the center, which was like the crack where two blinds fitted together, was false.

I shook them. They were solid as the stone casements, and their cold feel made me bend to examine them; then quickly I extracted a hairpin, scratched the paint from one, and found they were steel or iron bars made to look like wooden shutters.

With a gasp I glanced up and around that long, lovely room. All the windows were undoubtedly the same.

There were two doors, one leading to a bedroom, one to the roof patio, and I now noticed that the outside door was one of those heavy batten things one sees on old houses in New Orleans, having iron hinges that reached almost across the entire width of the door as if to band the heavy planks together—doors probably invented in the days of Indian raids.

I ran into the bedroom. It had a number of windows; all of them barred, and three doors leading to two closets and a bath. Not an outside door.

The only possible entrance or exit, even if there were a fire, was that massive front door. And once that was locked, a giant could not break in or out.

Odollee, paying no attention to my excited movement, was staring into the fire.

"Odollee," I cried, "let's get out of here before the door is locked—if it isn't already." I reached it, and it swung open.

"What's the matter, Jackie?"

"These rooms, barred. This is a prison."

"Nonsense."

"See for yourself. Try a pin on those shutters. Steel or iron. Not real openings. Solid as rock. Look at this door. It's the only way to get out, and I'd like to see you once it's locked."

SHE WENT swiftly to one of the

windows, tried to shake it, examined the false seam in the center, then scraped one of the flat half-turned bars. Now she moved from window to window, testing each in turn.

She ran into the bedroom. I stood outside the door to watch the stair. When she came back her face was very white.

"Jackie, I'm going to find my father at once. If he's on this island somebody must know where he is and will take me to him."

We went down the spiral stair, two steps at a time, clinging to the iron hand-rail to keep from falling; down the narrow corridor to the broader one.

In a short time we found ourselves in the big hall lounge of the first floor. The Chink was lighting oil lamps like old-time lanterns hung on iron brackets from the walls.

Odollee did not address him nor turn toward the front door, but in the opposite direction.

We passed through a perfect dungeon of a dining-room hung with oil portraits, the faces looking down stark and frightening in the gathering dusk.

I saw a side door and made a run for it, Odollee following.

AND NOW came a surprise that left us gasping. From the moment we had ridden out of the water in a dump-cart into a desolate marsh, to emerge from that into the gloom and mold of the front yard enclosing a pock-marked fortress, I had expected the worst. The interior of the house, even the barred room, had not been wholly unexpected.

But the last thing I could have imagined, the greatest surprise of this house of surprises, was to step out of a tomb-like dining-room with its staring dead faces into a beautiful garden.

It was patterned after pictures I'd seen of English gardens. Spreading velvet lawns, prim flower-beds presided over by groomed shrubbery. Under a rubber tree that must have measured a hundred feet across, a rustic tea-table and chairs were arranged on one side.

Even the house presented a new face here. Tall columns of yellow-white coral supported picturesque cornices of Oriental slate. A creamy stucco covered the entire eastern wall which, together with French doors and windows, bore the look, from this side, of a fairly new and pleasing house.

An overalled man stooping over a flower bed stood up at sight of us.

"Good evenin' to yees, ladies."

Never in my life had I so loved the Irish tongue.

"Tell me on your honor as an Irishman, what island is this?" was my irrelevant answer. He naturally appeared surprised.

"Sure, and how did yez git here if you don't know what island it is at all? What island do yez think it is, I'm askin'?"

"Are you Joe Tobia, the gardener?" asked Odollee.

"I am that," he answered joyously.

"Joe," said Odollee quietly, "I have come here to see M. Pierre Meynard. Will you tell me where he is?"

Joe looked at her a moment as if questioning her sanity, then burst out laughing.

"Ah, sure, and is it a joke ye air tryin' to play on me? Or is batty ye think I am?"

"Joe, is there such a person as Pierre Meynard?" I insisted.

"Why, shure, Miss." His mirth gave way before his obvious puzzlement. "Why, shure, Miss," he repeated, "there *wus* a Pierre Meynard, God rest his soul, but he's been dead for thirty years."

(*To be continued.*)

Excalibur, The Enchanted Sword

The Legend of the Cover Design

ENCHANTMENT? It must have been enchantment. For there it was, coming out of the depths of the lake—an arm, no more, rising above the waters.

Richly draped with samite it was, and holding aloft a wonderful sword in its scabbard, with the girdle wrapped around. What a sight to behold!

King Arthur watched—fascinated. His own sword had been broken, and now, as if by magic, this sword of mystery appeared before him.

As he watched, there also appeared a beautiful lady, who walked over the waters to him.

Arthur wanted the sword, and he told this to the Lady of the Lake. She gave it to him, but in return the king had to promise that he would grant one request she would make later on.

Excalibur had magic powers—it was an enchanted sword. The scabbard protected him from all harm as long as he wore it. And the sword always brought him victory, flashing in the eyes of the enemy with the light of twenty torches.

King Arthur made a lot of legendary history with the aid of that sword. But even enchantment couldn't endure forever.

Arthur received a fatal wound when his jealous sister, Morgan le Fay, substituted another scabbard for that of Excalibur during a memorable battle in which all the enemy had been slain. Only Arthur and a Knight of the Round Table had remained unscathed till the treachery of Ie Fay.

Knowing then that his end had come, Arthur told the Knight to throw Excalibur into the lake.

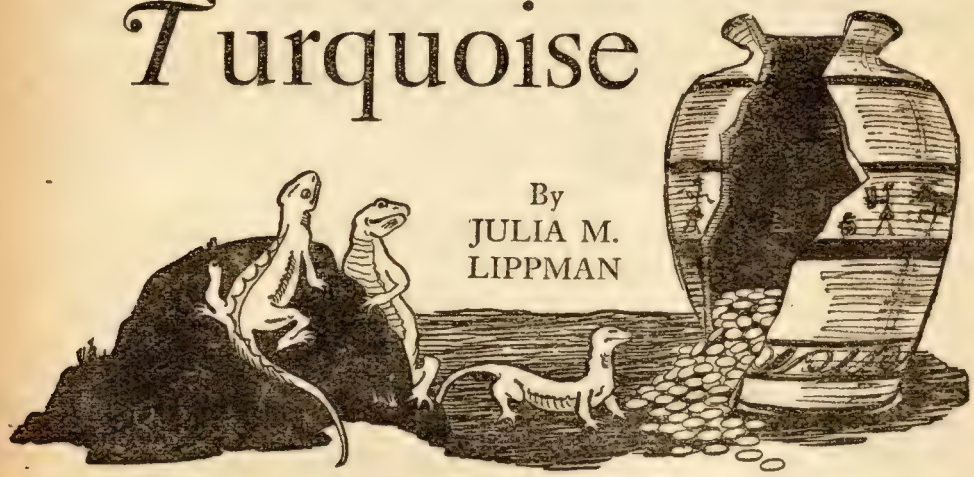
As the sword touched the water a hand suddenly appeared and seized it, and with a grand flourish disappeared with it back into the depths of the lake.

And there, perhaps, Excalibur still rests.

FRED T. EVERETT.

The Lady of the Turquoise

By JULIA M. LIPPMAN



IT WAS Doctor Selden, our old family M. D., who drew my attention to the fact that Rod had come to the end of his tether.

"Even if I hadn't such a strong personal attachment for the chap I'd feel a responsibility," old Selden explained.

"You were too young at the time to realize, but I prescribed Roderick Corning as a possible cure for what ailed you, poor, puny little cuss that you were, hedged in behind your grandfather's park palings, shut off from all normal, wholesome companionship—rotten-spoiled, kowtowed to as if you were royalty just because your grandfather was a multi-millionaire and you his sole heir.

"But when I brought Roderick Corning out of The Home for the Friendless to benefit you, it was with no notion of peonizing him. I've kept my eye on you both ever since, and I may as well confess that what I've seen hasn't been altogether reassuring.

"For years now Roderick's been working like a slave. No galley ever pulled harder or on a heavier oar than he's been doing ever since the two of you left Law School. No one but a chap like Corning would ever have succeeded in untangling the prodigious mess the executors made of your grandfather's estate.

"You're a sound-hearted chap, Pyne, in spite of your money. How is it you can stand by and see Corning sweating blood rebuilding your properties and never bat an eyelash? A man with less pluck and physique than Roderick, less devotion, would have gone down under it long ago."

Pleasant little lecture, that! Eh, what? Naturally I didn't smack my lips over it. I was hot under the col-

lar, but I was conscience-stricken, too.

I may be selfish but I'm no hog. I hadn't intended to do Rod an injury. Even if I hadn't cared such a deuce of a lot for the dear old scout, I'd . . . No matter!

Jove! This isn't a likable job, raking up dead ashes. Not so dead, either, when you come to think of it. You'll understand better what I mean when I've told you my story, which, by the way, isn't mine at all.

I HAD known, of course, there was no glory for Rod in bringing order out of the chaos of grandfather's affairs, nor in sticking around after he'd got the big complicated "Estate" so it could run itself, as it were, because I so infernally needed him in my business.

But Rod wasn't out after glory. No, nor money. What drove him was a very different force, the nature of which I only discovered later—a good deal later.

At that time it hadn't been revealed to me that mere cash has no currency value in the dearest transactions of life. And this is where you get your first look-in on one of those subterranean (or is it superterranean?) passages that lead—Lord knows where.

There had been times all through the years we were boys together when I felt that a hidden power, like an invisible cord, was dragging Rod back to something his whole nature was struggling to escape from.

I have seen him, a strong, courageous chap, literally, and, for no reason at all that I could conceive, cowering in terror. Or, anyhow, that was the impression that got across. It was all very subtle, very intangible.

You couldn't put your finger on it at any point whatsoever. But it was there—a lurking, haunting agony of dread that, even to see, caused a strangling sensation in one's throat.

I saw it several times when we were kids. It came and went like the shadow of smoke. And once, when we were boys, I saw another thing:

We were running, training for the school-race; mother-naked except for a loin-cloth and sandals.

Rod's skin is as whole and white as the skin of an egg. But, as we stood waiting for our turn to sprint, suddenly I saw on his back and wrists and ankles the scars of what must have been livid wounds.

Or—were they only the phantoms of scars? For the next instant they were gone, utterly, and I would have thought I had dreamed the nightmare except that his eyes were dumbly beseeching me not to have been aware.

Boys aren't celebrated for handling delicate matters with gloves. I recollect saying to Rod the second or third time I noticed the terrible thing I'm trying to put across:

"Looka here, Rod! Before you came to live at my house, did they ever do anything to hurt you at that place Doctor Selden took you out of?"

I shall never forget the way his eyes leaped the gap between his inner consciousness and my blunt question. They were like trapped things trying to dodge.

"No, never. They were always kind."

"Then, what're you scairt of?"

"What makes you think I'm scairt?"

"Oh, I d'know," I had the decency to lie.

I had asked because, for a second, by some subtle intimation, he had conveyed an impression of such throbbing agony as a slave might suffer in anticipation or recollection of the lash.

AFTER Doctor Selden was gone I made straight for the office. Rod was in his private room, sitting at his desk before a pyramid of papers, as numerous as the sands of the desert.

His back was toward me as I entered and something about the sag of the shoulders made me shrink. That same old look of devastating, unutterable misery was there—the look of one who has been punished to the limit, savagely, cruelly.

To dispose of the sense of strangulation, I coughed. Rod came to time on the instant, turned about, smiled a welcome and asked if I had a cold. It gave me my cue.

"Not a cold, exactly," I told him, "but something on my chest. Old Selden's put his foot down. Complete rest and change is my program. And a warmer climate—Italy, Egypt. But not a step do I go, if I have to go alone. Get me?"

I looked for opposition and was prepared to overcome it. But Rod was singularly docile. I came to realize that he, himself, felt that he had come to the end of his rope.

We left the office in competent hands and sailed for Italy in three weeks. I don't recollect how long we hung around Naples. There was no hurry and it was fun to do all the old time-worn stunts we had pulled off so often before.

The crossing had given Rod a splendid brace. One would have said he was as sound as a nut by the time we were ready to sail for Alexandria.

A man we knew, named Bayles, was in the consular service, stationed at Naples. He was dining with us one night at our hotel when, as ill-luck would have it, right there at the table, between courses, Rod's ghost walked.

Bayles has acted cicerone so long to so many that he's acquired the showman habit—one can't be with him two minutes but he's pointing out this or that, as you'd point out sights to a tourist.

"Don't look now, but after a bit just cast your eyes to the left of us—second table but one. English. The majestic matron is a dowager of high degree, aunt to the girl, who is Lady Constance Hathorton. She, in turn, is sister to the Earl of Filey, likewise the young cub vis-à-vis with her.

"She has a prodigious flair for Egypt. Goes regularly every season. But the boy is just out of school, seeing the near East for the first time and they want him to do it thoroughly while he's about it.

"The House of Filey is an old and great institution. But it's not affluent. These days the younger sons of great houses, as likely as not, have to turn and to hustle.

"There! You may look now! They're facing the other way.

"Did you ever see anything more splendid than that girl? I always say she has the air of Britomart, a Ladye Knight, or one of those fine pagan goddesses that used to preside over the ancient Egyptians. She presided over 'em, or somebody else, it seems, to such good effect that she wears, among other priceless Egyptian treasures, a neckless of antique turquoise the like of which doesn't exist. The British Museum would give its eye-teeth to possess it, I'm told.

"She's a splendid example of the British type—eh what? Large and benign, with a bovine softness in the eyes that—I say!—My God! What ails Corning?"

I looked, and the pain of punishment was in every line of Rod's face. It made one's flesh sick with pity. He was back in a flash from wherever his tortured spirit had been traveling and the meal went on as if nothing had happened.

THE DAY following we went to Capri. A male quartet aboard the little boat sang "Santa Lucia," "Funiculi-Funicula," and one especially Neapolitan thing Rod and I had first heard in a smoky little Italian dive we used to patronize when we were callow

youths and wanted to be very Bohemian and old—and couldn't quite make it.

We were trying now to be very Bohemian and young—and couldn't be—joining in the chorus each time it came round.

Suddenly Rod ceased singing and I looked up to find the younger son of the House of Filey standing at his elbow actively engaged in an attempt to swallow his Adam's apple, while he tried to overcome his preternatural shyness to the extent of explaining himself.

"Beg pardon!" he brought out with an effort. "I hear—that is, I gather you are Mr. Corning. My brother knew a chap named Corning at Eton —years ago. My brother (he's the Earl of Filey now) was Corning's fag at school and uncommonly fond of him. My sister and I have often heard Reggie speak of Robert Corning.

"So, when they told us you'd the same name, I thought—that is, my sister—I should say wondered if you really—Reggie's man was an American. From New York. I hope you are he."

Rod gave the lad one of his sure-fire smiles as he made haste to deny the soft impeachment. But his insistence on the fact that he had no connection with the great, original Corning of Eton fame didn't discourage the younger son. Nothing would do but that we must be presented to his people.

He led us to where his lady-sister and aunt were seated (enthroned would better describe it) and—that was the beginning.

THEY were booked to sail on our boat to Alexandria. The aunt was a likable enough old body, quite sensible and unaffected, once one got under the outer shell of her stuff. British high-born formality. The boy was harmless —or so I thought, then.

And the girl—Lady Constance Hathorton! I tried to pull the wool over my own eyes as to how I felt about her by pretending to disparage her, by trying to prove to myself, by way of Rod, that I would have preferred it if they had been sailing on another boat.

I can't of course quote verbatim, but what I said ran somewhat in this vein:

"Regarding her from the plastic point of view, she's a wonder. As a piece of sculpture she'd be superb. But as a real, sure-nuff woman she presents deficiencies. She's almost too splendid physically.

But I don't mind telling you, I find her too calmly, impassively bovine to suit me. She's like the personification of some great, primeval force—entirely glorious, utterly impersonal and —awfully uncomfortable to have in the house."

I don't know if Rod believed I spoke from the heart. But I would have been even denser than Bayles not to have seen that my airy persiflage fell flat.

IT HAD never occurred to me that some day Rod might fall in love. In the first place he figured in my mind as my own personal property. I had got so used to regarding him as part of my *entourage* that I couldn't picture him in any other environment.

He was concerned with *my* affairs. He was the brains back of *my* estate. The whole fabric would go to pieces without him.

As I look back I see that I thought of him more as a mechanism than as a human being. I couldn't or didn't conceive him as being a man subject to the same passions that the rest of us were.

Besides, how could he think of marriage when he hadn't two cents to crack against each other—nothing but the small income (small as in-

comes go nowadays) that he could make by keeping steadily at it.

And keeping steadily at it was precisely what had almost shattered him. I reasoned it out carefully and to my own entire satisfaction.

Rod was a man of common sense. He would never be so foolish as to give a serious second thought to anyone so out of his own social group, so far above him, as the Lady of the Turquoise, as I had fallen into the way of calling her to him and to myself. Even if she could be influenced to recognize him on any terms save those of high condescension, there was the fact that *I* intended to marry her.

It sounds detestable, but I considered my case as being in quite a different category than Rod's. The House of Filey might not admit that American descent is any distinction, but I have never known American dollars to be discounted in any country.

The aunt (Rule Britannia, I dubbed her) took pains to tell me—I thought I saw why—the Lady's distinguished lineage. The House could trace its course through unbroken lines of unimpeachable eminence back into the mists of antiquity when a crusader or a knight-errant or something had broken the record in Turkey, or Palestine, or was it Egypt?

In any event, he had espoused (she said 'espoused', so I suppose that's what he did) the king's daughter and been enormously enriched by the alliance and raised to the rank of prince or duke or god, or semi-god—it amounts to the same thing, I believe, in the minds of "some."

Through other sources I had learned that the riches had dwindled in the course of the years and I could see that a new infusion might not be scorned, when its source was at least as good as any country could produce.

Don't dispose of me as a purse-proud snob without recalling how I was brought up. Treated as royalty, flattered, pampered, given to understand there was nothing I couldn't have for the buying.

Honestly, I never swanked because of my property. But when I met Constance Hathorton I blessed my stars for it, because it gave me a bigger "pull." To put it less offensively, I saw my money as the golden pyx in which my oblation—love, you know—might look less unworthy.

I sound highflown? I was. That bit about the pyx and the oblation took the deuce of a long time to compose and memorize so I could reel it off when the time came, as naturally as if it were an ordinary thing for me to be lyrical when I'm moved. I have it in me to be moved all right, but the trouble is, I can't express what I feel.

But, to get back to my story. . . . .

OUR TWO parties didn't start out together, but we kept running into each other all over the place, so that after a bit we left off trying to run separately and made a merger.

As I look back I can see Arthur's hand in it. He played an adroit game from the start, I tell you. Without in the least obtruding or intruding he was the real director of all our moves.

I couldn't account for it, for the boy was not in the least clever or original. He was more like a marionet, operated invisibly by some inspired manipulator behind the scenes.

At first it rather amused me to see how all our common concerns revolved about Arthur. I say I was amused. That was only at the beginning. I'm not accustomed to playing second fiddle and, to be frank, I didn't like it.

And then, gradually, it became apparent that my hold on Rod was being weakened. You've seen a youngster clutching fiercely something he

has taken possession of, while a person with more power or authority slowly but surely detaches it—first one finger, then another, until at last the kid has lost his grip entirely? Well, that was my case. I felt I was losing my grip on Rod. It made me edgy as the mischief.

Justly or unjustly I held the English people responsible. If I had stopped to consider I'd have known I wasn't playing a politic game. You're not apt to charm a girl by baiting her relatives and exhibiting yourself in the rôle of sulky superior to your "Buddy."

Rod fell into the way of treating me as one would treat a fractious child—terribly offensive to my sense of dignity and position. Still, we managed to rub along until one day he announced with what I interpreted as feigned matter-of-factness:

"Arthur wants to go to Sinai."

"Well, tell him to run along. He has my consent," I grinned as glib as glue.

Rod didn't grin. Neither did I, later, when I discovered that while Arthur's mind was, apparently, Britishly fixed on the Sinai trip, his people's were, apparently, as Britishly fixed against it unless Roderick or I, one or the other—or both, would go with him.

"Not on your life," said I. And I suspected that ended it.

Not at all. Young Arthur swallowed his pride and came and pleaded with me. Likewise "Rule Britannia." The more they urged, the less I saw the great idea.

I was in a mood when I read "ulterior motive" into everything. They were working to get Rod away from me. It was a concerted plan.

Only the Lady of the Turquoise showed no partiality for Rod over me. She went her way, apparently as detached as if she had been a graven image watching the mysterious rites of human sacrifice at her shrine.

I told her to her face one day, in my exasperation, that it was human sacrifice they were planning. I told her Rod was practically worn out from years of overstrain. The doctor's word "slavery" slipped out by mistake.

"In whose interest has he been slaving?"

I heard her question but didn't answer it.

"The doctor ordered him to Egypt for a rest," I hurried on. "It would be a famous rest for him, wouldn't it, to spend the better part of a month on camel-back, being heaved over a red-hot desert!

"And from start to finish he'd be responsible for Arthur. Whatever happened he'd be expected to hand over Arthur safe and sound, as fit as when he started.

"Corning doesn't know the Arabic. He's not prepared to grapple with dragomen or the drivers or the Bedouins. He'd be at the mercy of the whole outfit."

The Lady regarded me calmly, as if she were trying to control my excitement, with her clear, unflinching, deep, unfathomable, blue eyes.

"Mr. Corning is not obliged to go," she observed quietly. "Whatever he does he will do because he wishes to do it."

"You bet he won't!" I blurted out, stung to a rage. "What Corning does he'll do because *I* wish it. You evidently don't know—it's not a matter of public concern—that Corning is in my service. My salaried employee."

EVEN in my blind passion I saw her face change. Her eyes looked at me—no, through me, to something beyond. I wheeled about in my fury—Rod was standing in the doorway.

We had been sitting in the Hathorton's private parlor. Corning quietly drew the door to upon himself and

came forward without a word. His quiet was awful, ominous.

My mind went back in a quick leap to a time when we'd been kids and he had flogged me. He had been just as quiet then. I knew he wouldn't strike me now. But I'd far rather he had struck me than done what he did.

"Mr. Pyne is perfectly right"—he brought the words out slowly—"what he has told you is quite true. I am his salaried servant. His people took me out of an institution to be his companion when we were both little shavers.

"I was told then, and I have had every reason to believe, that it was a rare chance for such a poor little beggar. Mr. Pyne has been most kind and generous from the first.

"It is my own fault if I misread his kindness and generosity. I forgot I was a salaried servant. I felt he was my brother, to be loved and safeguarded as one.

"They say servants don't know their place nowadays. You see, I have proved it to be true, in my own case at least. It was my joy and pride to work for him as if I had been his slave, just because what I was doing was a labor of love. I thought nothing short of death and destruction could have smashed our tie.

"But he can get plenty of salaried employees. Under the circumstances I am, at least, foot-free. I think you want me to go with your brother to Sinai, Lady Hathorton. I had come to tell you it was impossible. Now if you still wish me to do it, I will go."

If I had forgotten myself and acted like a cad, I was punished. I tried to explain, apologize. I remember stammering a word or two and then being struck dumb or blind or something.

My physical eyes saw black, and when the cloud lifted it was as though some great inner light in me—a sort of x-ray—had dispersed it. I was still standing, my eyes fixed on Rod. But what I saw was not the Rod I had seen a moment before.

I saw him standing naked, girt about the middle with a loin-cloth. On his ankles and about his wrists were heavy manacles such as chain-gang wretches wear. God! It made my flesh creep.

I saw his face set and slowly, slowly, throughout all his body, the little veins began to show, the muscles stood out like whipcords. There was a heart-bursting moment and—he was free!

The last I remember was recalling a similar stunt of Houdini's and then things went black again. I'm sure I didn't lose consciousness.

What happened must have been instantaneous, over before it had fairly begun, for when I "came to," as the saying is, I was still planted like a dummy before the Lady and Rod, realizing the uselessness of words in such a jam. It was like stabbing a man in the back and then saying: 'I *beg* your pardon!'

Perhaps the very pitifulness of my plight was my best appeal. Rod squared his shoulders, flung back his head and nodded over as much as to say: "'S all right!"

But I knew it wasn't all right and never would be again. It was then that I lost Rod, and not later, when he and the boy left for Suez and I caught a glimpse of him standing on the rear platform of the slow-moving train, a man in every inch of the gallant six feet two of him.

ONCE he was really gone the interminable weeks dragged drearily. We tried our best to divert our minds. No go! The Lady was uncommonly kind to me, but I wasn't deceived.

I would have been a fool not to know by this time that I had no chance. And when I thought of Rod —how she had sacrificed him for a whim—I felt I didn't much care.

All my soul was up in arms, one feeling warring with another. But it always ended in my knowing I loved her in spite of everything and would keep on loving her to the end.

After Rod and the boy struck into the interior there weren't even letters, cold comfort as they are when you're longing for the real thing.

At first we took it philosophically but when the time stretched on and on I got a jumpy sense of something's having happened. All things being equal, which of course they never are, the two should have been back long ago.

"My God!" I blurted out desperately one evening. "How can you stand by looking like the Sphinx and never bat an eyelash? I'm ready to do something desperate. Anything would be better than this cursed suspense." The Lady regarded me gravely.

"You mean that, literally? That anything would be better than *not to know?* she asked.

"Mean it?" I cried. "Of course I mean it."

"Then"—her usually steady voice had a break in it—"then I can tell you that—he and Arthur are captives in the mountains of Sinai. They are being held for ransom."

I leaped to my feet. "How do you know?" Who told you? It's not true! Why wasn't I informed?" I heard myself shouting.

Her low-pitched English voice, always so exquisitely modulated, put my violence to shame.

"No one told me," she stated simply. "I saw for myself—last night."

LORD knows this was no time for merrymaking but I laughed. I thought she was chaffing until I looked at her more directly and saw that her eyes were as deep and grave as grief. Then I realized the poor thing, so outwardly composed, had gone clean fluey over Arthur, in her mind.

"Saw them — for yourself — last night?"

"I tried to keep my face straight so she wouldn't suspect I considered her, for the time being, a lunatic.

She met me with the patient tolerance one would use toward a blundering child.

"I saw them for myself last night," she repeated distinctly, the words coming slowly as if drawn out of her only by great effort.

"You mean, you dreamed it," I smiled, relieved. "Oh, yes, I see."

Quickly she caught me up.

"No, I don't mean that. Last night when my body slept I sent Myself—my Master Self—out to find them. They are in the mountains of Sinai. Prisoners.

"Messengers are on the way bringing, as identification, the Scarab ring you gave Mr. Corning in Cairo. They will arrive very shortly now. They will demand huge ransom—more than I could ever pay. . . .Unless you——"

She turned away to hide her face from the blank stare I was training on it.

She was in dead earnest. I could hardly believe my own eyes, my own ears, but there was no doubt about it. She took herself seriously and believed the tomfool guff she was giving me.

It was so unlike her that my mind cast about for some logical explanation. Fool! Why hadn't I caught on at once? She had been trying to lead up to "the worst," break it to me gently, whatever it was.

"You've heard from our consul at Cairo?" I ventured quietly. "Or the bankers? If those Bedouin devils should actually have kidnapped Rod and the boy they'd be holding them for ransom and their first move would be to open negotiations with the American consulate or the Crédit Lyonnais. They know the ropes—trust 'em!"

"Your consul has no news, though it's on the way. He can't hear for two days yet. The same with the bankers. If you don't believe me, wait and see!"

THOUGH I had the grace not to tell her so I neither believed her nor would I wait and see. But she'd got me stirred up until I couldn't rest in my bed. I telegraphed Cairo at once and the reply came back hot over the wire:

"No information of any kind. Will investigate if you so instruct."

I instructed, briefly but explicitly. If the thing were actually so, if it were buying Rod and the boy free, money would be no object. An agent under proper escort was to be sent out without delay, taking the road Rod's caravan had taken, meet the rogues who had kidnaped him and the lad, and make terms with them at whatever cost.

I myself started out for Suez that night to oversee the relief party and deliver last instructions. Then, for the first time, I got a wink of sleep.

Perhaps it was owing to my wrought-up state, insomnia and all, that when Cairo called me up directly on my return to Luxor where I had rejoined the Lady and Rule Britannia, saying word had just been received to the effect that Mr. Corning and young Hathorton were being held prisoner somewhere in the Sinai wilderness and might be redeemed for so-and-so much money paid down in negotiable currency, and no questions asked—bearers being in a position to prove their identity by a ring, etc., etc.—I promptly went off my nut. For which hysterical, womanish proceeding I'll never forgive myself as long as I live.

Doubtless to keep me level the Lady planned all sorts of little excursions to places she must have known from A to Izzard. She pretended we were doing Karnak by moonlight for the first time. And right here was where she got a second rise out of me.

LITTLE by little I had come to understand what she meant when she had spoken of the lure of Egypt one night on the boat coming over. I understood that, but not the rest.

Not the silent, awe-struck, reverential mood into which the chattering donkey-boys fell the moment she appeared. Not her scholarly familiarity with the earliest lore of the land, all that pertained to the history of Egypt in her glory.

Not her unfailing authority on matters of scholarly dispute, chronological epitomes, laws, customs, cults. Not the fact that her word was accepted as the ultimate by Egyptologist and fellah-een alike.

Above all, not the majesty of her bearing nor the wonder of her eloquence as we wandered through the temple and she made live for me, as though it were happening before my very eyes, the splendid pageantry of priests and people in devotion at their sacred rites.

It was, for all the world, as if Karnak's ruined wreck of ancient grandeur had gathered itself together, stood up and reared its magnificent columns in perfect symmetry to the sky.

I glanced toward the Lady to see if she were getting the same impression, and there in the moonlight she stood, tall and fair and motionless as an image, her face turned toward the stars, her lips slightly parted, as if she herself were weaving the spell.

I felt it close about me in a mist, soft and clinging and potent. It cleared and I was back amid a scene and time I had known and loved—"When I was a king in Babylon."

An ancient familiarity told me I had once belonged here and the thousand faint, mystic lurings I had felt

since ever I set foot on this strange soil were only the silent voices of Egypt claiming her own.

Fantastic nonsense?

Granted.

But I could not shake it off, even after the vision had faded. Nor could I hide from the Lady how moved I was. She nodded, smiling faintly in sympathetic understanding, and not in ridicule.

IT HAD grown to be a sort of habit of ours even before Rod left to browse about the temple of Der-el-Bahri across the plain on the other bank of the Nile.

Early in the morning we'd cross the river in one of the heavy, native boats, mount our donkeys and trot silently along to where the wonderful cliffs blaze and burn in the sunlight behind the dazzling white of the terraced temple walls.

When the sunshafts strike the sandstone it quivers and palpitates color, shooting out prismatic hues like living flames—orange, green, heliotrope, sapphire. It is as if one were in the heart of a fiery opal.

"One could fancy it a fire-girt rock on which Brunnhilde slept until her lover's kiss wakened her and made her human," I said tritely to the Lady a few days after I had returned from seeing my man off for the Peninsular.

"Do you suppose the ancient Egyptians had a myth at all like the Norse legend of Siegfried? Don't tell me if they hadn't. I'd like to think there was a goddess here—goddess or semi or demi or something, who was made wholly human by the love-kiss of a mortal."

The Lady flushed.

"The Hathor of this temple was supposed to be the deity of the sky, the goddess of Joy and Love," she said. "You have noticed how the ceiling of the first room in her shrine is decorated with stars on a blue ground. That is symbolic.

"Her worshipers conceived her as adoring blue, the color of the heavens, typifying faith and trust, and they used to render up offerings of turquoise at her shrine. She was called 'The Lady of the Turquoise.'"

Involuntarily I started. She stopped for a moment as if to steady me.

"In those days," she went on, "the Egyptians knew of but one place to get turquoise and that was"—she hesitated, then brought it out bravely, if in a lower tone—"the old turquoise mines of Sinai which, at the time of Moses, had been worked for upward of two thousand years.

"They used to fit out caravans, cross to the Peninsula and strike for the desert. It was a cruelly hard and dangerous journey. Costly, too.

"Sometimes the hostile desert tribes beset them and did dreadful damage, looting camels and treasure, very often killing outright.

"The Egyptians were sorely pressed. They wanted to do honor to Hathor, but they dreaded the cost. They wondered if, perhaps, they could devise a simpler means of securing their votive offerings.

"They did not say much, but they set about experimenting with clay and dyes, and at last they succeeded in manufacturing a kind of paste that was quite a clever imitation of turquoise and if"—the Lady smiled at the whimsicality of the notion—"if Hathor had been nearsighted she might have mistaken it for the real thing.

"But if Hathor knew the difference she never said so, and her worshipers made beads and ornaments of the substitute and offered them up at her shrine as devoutly as if they hadn't been sham. So the journeys to Sinai ceased, the making of blue paste went gaily on, and now, thousands of years after, we find sham turquoise in al-

most every tomb that is excavated hereabouts.

"It is an uncommonly human sort of story, isn't it? I have often thought it is precisely the kind of thing we ourselves do with our God and"—she hesitated—"our love and our ideals generally. When we find the real thing calls for sacrifice we take refuge in sham."

WE WERE lingering late today. The evening had fallen like a veil of apricot gauze.

I don't know what possessed me, but there in that immemorial stillness I let fling, noisily, furiously. I don't of course recall the words I used but they were not picked for their gentle charity, I can swear.

I upbraided her. I denounced her. I implored her. I adored her. I knew I was raving like a madman, but I said whatever came to my mind.

I told her she had deliberately schemed to part Rod and me. I told her I saw through her, and quite understood how young Arthur had been used as a tool to deprive me not only of an indispensable business-manager but a lifelong friend.

Even if by luck he were still alive and came back, it wouldn't be to me. How was I to get along without him? He knew more about my affairs than I did.

I depended on his judgment and skill and taste in everything. I'd give him double, treble what he'd been getting rather than lose him. It would *pay* me to do it. His good sense, his brains, saved me thousands and tens of thousands a year.

I accused her of every sort of guile and craftiness in planning to separate us. But what her motive might be—that was the thing I couldn't fathom.

She allowed me to exhaust myself before she uttered a syllable. Then, to my everlasting amazement, quietly, without the slightest indication of resentment or remorse, she said:

"Quite so: You are absolutely correct. I did deliberately work to liberate Mr. Corning. I did use my brother Arthur as a wedge to separate you, if you like to describe it that way. Mr. Corning has been a slave long enough. He has earned his freedom. And, on the other hand, you have outlived your rôle of petty despot. He is liberated and so must you be."

She paused, then, in a different manner, spoke again.

"You have offered me your love. Some day another woman will be glad to receive what I can't take, because some day your love will be better, purer than it is now—the real thing, not imitation.

"I think Hathor would be wiser today than in those ancient times. Less of a deity, more of a woman. She would accept nothing short of the gem itself even if it were offered in a golden setting—or was it *pyx* you said?

"There is only one *pyx* worthy to hold love. One may have to break it to prove one's faith—as an alabaster box of precious ointment was broken once upon a time." Her voice frayed off into something like a smothered sob.

I SAT mute beside her on the parapet.

Rule Britannia with the maid, Stanhope, had wandered off to the lower terrace to watch a peculiar effect of light on the distant plain.

"Did I say break one's heart for love? I was wrong. There is no such thing as that. One only makes it stronger, more enduring. But the years pass, and pass, and we do not learn. No! It is blue paste we give instead of turquoise. Always—paste. Wait! Not always. Once—long ago——"

She was gazing over the ruins,

across the terrace and her eyes were fixed in an hypnotic sort of stare upon a tiny point of light glimmering far below in the dimness—the torch of a belated traveler, or the lamp of the keeper of the Chalet Hatasu.

"It was never the turquoise for itself I loved. It was what it symbolized—the devotion, the faith, the trust."

She spoke dreamily, in a soft, lulling monotone.

"These are the dearest gifts. But they cost—oh, but they cost! I remember——

"It was long, long ago—and it was *here*. I remember how the very soul of me cried out against the sham, the bitter hypocrisy of it all.

"They thought they had fooled me. They thought I didn't know. One day when my hope in better things for them was almost gone, one day appeared a poor man. A slave. Somehow he had done it—broken free, carrying a wonderful treasure in his bosom.

"He had suffered tortures. Hunger, thirst, the lash. But he had come back and he brought me the real thing—the most splendid, flawless turquoise. He had just strength enough left to lay it at my shrine and then—then it was over.

"Poor soul! He did not know that the turquoise, perfect as it was, was nothing in comparison with the love and faith it stood for. *They* were the priceless gifts. They have the power to make dreams come true. They give life to things we call inanimate.

"His act did for Hathor what Siegfried's kiss did for Brunhilde. Ask any woman if she would not gladly exchange Olympus, Walhalla, for—heaven."

AGAIN she paused, then took up the thread again in the same muted voice.

"Since then I've waited patiently. I knew he must return some day. It is all dim between. I can't recollect what happened in the long, empty stretches of time. But I knew I would see him on this planet again. I knew he would come. And he has.

And what he brings is no counterfeit. And I tell you, who are rich and powerful and who once held the whip over him—I tell you that though he is poor and a thousand times a slave I love him—love him—love him!"

She had risen in the sort of trance that had fallen on her, and now she stood in the white moonlight in her white cloak, her arms stretched straight before her as if she were expecting Rod to walk into them. So wonderful she looked I could think of nothing but a young sibyl or—it came to me with the blinding light of a revelation—the reincarnation of Hathor herself.

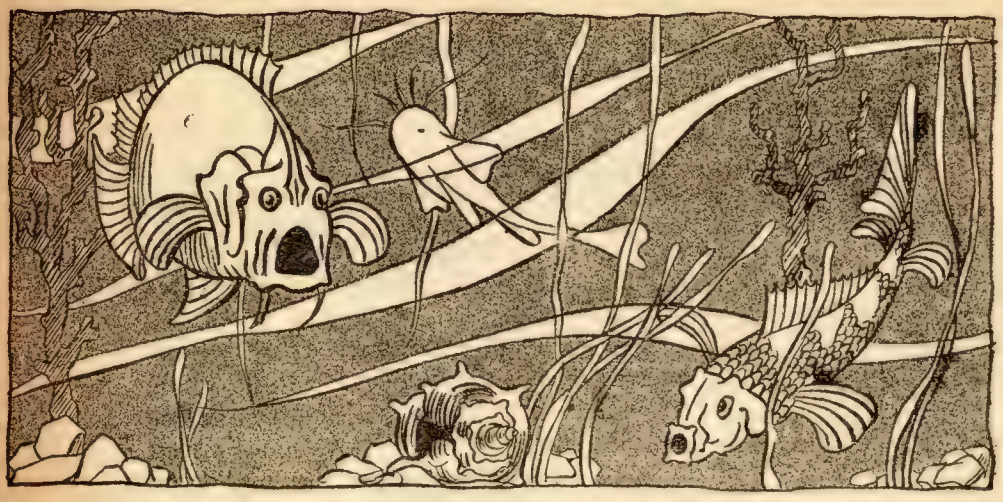
My heart was in my throat. I don't know what I thought. I don't know what I felt.

But the next instant a great shout broke the stillness and I saw a frail, pale ghost staggering up the ramp, his torch held high, Arthur trudging behind him.

Rod had come back—from danger, from bondage for ransom, from Sinai.

It took but one look into his eyes to see he had brought back his tribute—the most priceless offering of all.

The Lady of the Turquoise gave him that look, and then went to him and—the rest of us didn't exist for her—folded him in her strong young arms with the sweetest smile of human love I have ever seen on a woman's face.



Blowhard

By CHARLES FRANCIS COE

IN a marshy flat ten miles inland Carp River is born. Here and there a bubbling spring oozes through the ground, joins forces with others of its kind, wanders indolently about as though uncertain of its own intentions, and then flows ever so gently toward the great lake. Soon Carp River takes entity and its whispering wash might well be a song of pride in its own doing.

For the river serves a great purpose before it empties into the lake. About three miles inland it broadens into a sizable stream, though its banks are still overhung by willows and here and there one may discover little pools covered by emerald green moss.

Bass are wont to lurk about the submerged stumps of these pools and feed upon the crawfish that cling to the weeds.

A mile from the lake the river comes into its own. Small wooden piers jut into its lapping waters. On its bosom ride fishing dories, and there are two or three small tugs which churn in and out every other day or so. Here lies the village of fisher folk who, from the lake, eke out a perilous and frugal existence.

The Dominion of Canada, much as though it were endeavoring to prolong the life of the river, has erected a concrete pier which runs almost a mile out into the lake.

On the extreme end of the pier is a range light tower and from this structure there runs along the top of the pier an iron rail to which keepers of the light may lash themselves when squalls churn the waters of the shallows into frenzy.

Carp River laps gently along the lee side of this pier and the lake, most treacherous of all waters it has

been said, booms against the weather side. The contrast lends the river enchantment.

Pound nets are moored over the shallows of the lake and out beyond them are spread great drift-nets where the bigger fish run. There may be taken the blue and yellow pike that bring high prices; the whitefish, staple food and sure money for the fishermen; and, now and then, even a muskalonge or a sturgeon.

When that happens the fishermen haul with all the skill of their trade that costly linen nets may not be damaged by flashing teeth or threshing tail.

Out at the drift-nets the tugs work and when nets are hauled and the return must be made before an in-shore wind, Carp River performs its greatest service. To the returning tugs it extends the hand of safety.

Once within the lee of Dominion Pier boats ride at ease, or steam slowly to their moorings and seem to welcome the gentle lapping of the water as a child might the caress of a motherly hand.

WHEN the work of the day is done men like to gather at Rem Wildon's store. Besides Wildon there are but two men in the village who are not fishermen. These men hold an enviable position in the community because the Dominion pays them nine hundred dollars a year as keepers of the range light. That salary exceeds the earnings of the best of the fishermen.

Because the range tower commands a view of the shallows and the drift-nets beyond them, it is customary for the keepers to post the villagers by telephone as to events on the lake. When the weather is heavy anxious listeners gather at Wildon's store, which possesses the only telephone in the village.

One of the keepers is much loved. His name is Peter Bright, and he has twenty-odd years of Dominion service to his credit. When fate has dealt unkindly with the fishermen he has helped them. The damaging of a net, or a boat, he regards as a summons to aid.

The other, through nine years of service in the village, has built for himself a universal unpopularity. Because of the certainty of his salary and the security in which he lives, he is condescending in his attitude toward others.

Huge of physique and raucous of voice, he is not inaptly called "Foghorn." Within the memory of the villagers none ever performed a task as well as Foghorn assured them it would have been done by himself.

"Foghorn," Rem Wildon one time stated guardedly, "is just like an achin' tooth that won't loosen up a mite so's you can snake 'er out!"

REM WILDON stood on the low step of his store gazing nervously out toward the tower on the end of Dominion Pier. Tears streamed over his cheeks and his clothes were whipped close about him by a bleak wind that swept inland from the lake.

Even Carp River had felt the lash of that wind, and dories had been pulled high on the beach, their oars lashed to the wooden pier stiles and their bottoms turned upward to shed the rain that hung threateningly in the heavens.

In the distance Dominion Pier loomed like a wallowing monster. Its flat top was glistening with flying spray and not infrequently clear green water dashed over its fifteen-foot height.

As Wildon watched, the figure of a man appeared on the ladder leading downward from the range light. He had somewhat the appearance of a spider in a gaunt web. It took him some time to gain the concrete pier below and there he paused to chain

himself to the safety rail before undertaking his arduous journey landward.

"Foghorn!" Wildon grunted in soured tone. "I'm glad he's comin' in! I'd hate for to have him tellin' it forevermore if somethin' should—happen!"

A few moments more he watched and saw that Foghorn, big as he was, was finding trouble battling against the rush of the wind and the flying water. Then, behind him, the telephone bell rang and he turned and entered the store, sliding through the door and closing it quickly after him to shut out the biting wind. His wife had already spoken, and she turned toward him as he entered, silently holding forth the receiver of the instrument.

Wildon paused only to slide out of the heavy coat he had been wearing, then cast a glance of inquiry at the woman.

"It's Peter Bright, Rem," she said slowly. "He says it's bad——"

"I tried to stop 'em," Rem muttered as he took the telephone, "a fool coulda seen what was comin'!"

"The net ain't paid fer, Rem," the woman seemed to chant. "It's a heap o' money—eight hun'nerd dollars!"

"Not so much as three thousan'!" Wildon snapped. "That's what they paid for the boat they're out there riskin'!"

Then he took the transmitter and spoke briefly: "It's me, Peter—Rem," he said.

"It's a ragin' blow, Rem," came the voice of the keeper who had relieved Foghorn in the tower. "I ain't ever see it worse! The boys ain't reached the nets yet, but I can see the buoys an' I guess they got 'em marked, too."

"How near the shallows, Peter?" Wildon asked, fearfully. "That's what's worryin' 'em—they're afraid the net'll drift back into the shallows an' git tore up on the rocks."

"Too near," came the discouraging response. "I can't see no chance for the nets—an' the tug is goin' to go if they bear in much closer!"

Thereafter Rem was obliged to wait until Peter Bright left the telephone and peered out across the raging water of the shallows for a better view of what was taking place. In the interim Rem permitted his eyes to rove over the interior of his little store. Sensing that the wire was quiet, his wife queried again:

"What's he say, Rem?" she urged. "Tell me what he says."

"He says it's bad," Wildon quoted sorrowfully. "He can't see no chance for the nets an' even the tug is goin' to go if they don't give up right quick an' come in——"

Her hands clenched impotently, the woman roamed the narrow confines of the store. She paused as the door burst open and a whirl of wind rattled the array of yellowed advertisements which ornamented the walls. Foghorn, his dripping oilskins hanging over his arm, entered.

"Them Cryan boys is fools!" he greeted them raucously. "What they go out there in a tug, fer? Tell me that, can you? Fools they are!"

He stamped into the place and allowed his oilskins to fall to the floor as he went to a showcase and extracted a plug of tobacco which he waved in the direction of Wildon.

"Yes, sir!" he thundered on. "Fools! Folks don't seem to know nothin' nowadays!"

Wildon's wife had taken to her nervous pacing again and the storekeeper, a look of disgust on his features, shifted uneasily at the telephone.

Foghorn seemed not to see that they accepted his words much as one might a toothache. Shrugging his huge shoulders at their unconcern, he gathered his oilskins from the damp

spot they had left on the floor and turned to leave.

COMING toward the place from the beach he saw a woman. Her figure was small, bent with years of toil, and her head was wrapped in a faded shawl which her claw-like hands clutched tight about her throat.

"Here comes their old woman," he announced. "I s'pose she's right due for a spell o' whinin', now!"

Once again his remarks went unanswered; but Wildon's wife went to the door and opened it as Martha Cryan entered. The old woman braced herself for a moment in an attempt to catch her breath. Her eyes fell first upon Foghorn, and she turned toward him as though to speak.

"Yep!" the man grinned sneeringly, "them lads o' yours is out there! Out there in a tug—the fools!"

But as he spoke the woman saw that Wildon was at the telephone and knew that he was speaking directly with the one man who could see the battle her sons were making. In a voice that was strained, parched under the fires of her terror, she asked:

"What's he say, Rem? What's Peter say?"

Wildon ran his tongue over lips that had suddenly gone dry.

"He's lookin' now, Martha," he evaded in hollow tone.

"They went out there on my account," Martha Cryan muttered, her slight frame shuddering with apprehension. "They knew it wasn't safe —but they went—fer me——"

"I reckon they know what they're about," Wildon attempted in soothing tone.

"They're fools, that's what they are!" Foghorn bellowed. "They hadn't a right to make it when they started out! They should have knowed better'n to take a tug out there!"

Martha Cryan moaned softly and turned again toward Rem Wildon. Almost as though in answer to her mute supplication and as a justification of Foghorn's heartless remarks, the voice of Peter Bright came again over the wire:

"They can't make it, Rem!" he was shouting. "Never under heaven! They're most on the rocks now, an' I don't think the tug'll make way through the seas—her screw's outa water half the time!"

"What's he sayin', Rem?" Martha Cryan begged again.

"He says they're makin' a great fight, Martha," Wildon lied. But his eyes refused to meet hers and his voice held a note that convicted him.

"Don't lie to me, Rem," the woman urged, her hands writhing in the folds of the shawl at her throat, "don't do that! It'd be all the worse later—if—if——"

"I'm the one's tellin' you the truth, old woman!" Foghorn bellowed. "Listen to me. I know what I'm talkin' 'bout!"

His great voice filled the room and seemed to jar upon the ears of the others. For a moment Martha Cryan lost her head. She whirled on the man:

"Shut up—you!" she snapped.

But before he could respond she had turned again to Wildon and, with a catch in her voice despite her effort to control it, asked:

"Rem! Are they—gone?"

"No!" Wildon cried in a tone that indicated his joy at this one favorable answer that was possible. "No! They ain't gone!"

Martha Cryan made a queer little noise in her throat and darted to Wildon's side where her scrawny hand clutched the arm which held the receiver. There she clung, a pitiable figure, avidly devouring the word that came from Peter Bright.

"Gone!" Foghorn bellowed then, his face flushed with anger at the re-

buff the woman had offered him a moment before, "why should they be gone? If you'd bred men 'stead o' weaklin's——!"

The aspersion on the sons who even then were making a fight to save all that they possessed, proved the last straw upon Martha Cryan's control. She whirled away from the telephone and faced the hulky figure. Her eyes seemed afire as she shook off Wildon's restraining hand:

"You — you — blowhard!" she cried. "One o' my lads is worth a million o' such as you! Don't you dare say them things. Not to me! I ain't afraid o' your gabby mouth!"

WILDON turned from the instrument in amazement; his wife uttered a low cry of warning and threw an arm about the enraged mother.

Foghorn, his raucous voice suddenly stilled, twisted his coarse face into an angry glare. Under the lash of anger his great shoulders writhed.

But Peter Bright was speaking again and his words, to Wildon, the wife, and Martha Cryan formed a message of wondrous joy:

"They made it, Rem," came his excited voice. "By the leapin' lizards, it was a close squeak, though! I thought they was on the rocks half a dozen times!"

"They made it!" Wildon relayed in high-pitched tones. "They made it! They're all right! Wait a minute," he admonished then, as more words came over the wire.

Martha Cryan, sensing trouble from the expression which crept rapidly into Rem's face, was plunged again into the depths of fear.

"What's he sayin' now?" she breathed raspingly. "What's he sayin', Rem?"

For an answer Wildon waved a silencing hand and pressed the receiver hard against his ear. Finally he spoke:

"They'll be gettin' in all right, Martha," he assured her, "but—but they couldn't get the nets. They left 'em——"

There was one convulsive flutter of the worn hands that gripped the shawl, then a wan smile played over Martha Cryan's face.

"Just so they get in," was her only response.

FROM other houses in the village people were coming toward the store now. Villagers who had just learned that the Cryan boys had braved the squall in order to rescue their nets.

These heard the story and joined in a satisfaction tempered with the good word that the men were safe, and the word that the nets were abandoned to destruction on the rock fangs of the shallows.

"It'll take all they kin get for the tug to pay fer the nets," Wildon's wife whispered in frightened tones. "What'll they do?"

There was none to answer that poignant question. But there were many who gathered about Martha Cryan and comforted her in the hysterical tears of joy that streamed down her seamed cheeks.

It was suddenly borne in upon Foghorn that, of all the people there, his was the one opinion undesired and without value. With the dawning of that realization his face set in an angry grimace.

"They left the nets!" he bellowed incredulously. "You mean to say them whipper-snappers quit 'cause there's a mild breeze blowin'? Well, of all the yellowbacks ever I seen——"

As though words were not to be found to express his contempt, he swaggered about the crowded store and gloried in the obvious fact that others made way for him.

"Weaklin's like that'd be a sight better off dead!" he finally grunted.

THAT proved too much for the hysterical Martha Cryan. Sentiments that had been pent up for all those nine years rushed into words in an irresistible torrent:

"You big, hulkin' blowhard!" she screamed. "Go back to your lighthouse an' watch better men earn an hones' livin'! Go back to your million-dollar sidewalk an' chain yourself up so's you won't git your feet wet!"

The shawl which she had held tightly about her head fluttered free as her scrawny hands clenched into fists before the face of the astonished Foghorn. With a fury that threatened to burn out her energies but which lent to her a sudden power, she threw aside those who tried to quiet her and darted forward to face the mighty Foghorn.

"I'm sick o' you!" she told him. "Sick o' you an' your cheap an' everlastin' talk! Talk! That's all you do! Talk! Talk! Talk! You—you —Foghorn!"

"Shut up, you old crone!" Foghorn raged impotently. "This here place ain't never seen a man like me! I'd take them two sons o' yours an' bust 'em between my fingers! I'd break every man in this town! Come an' try me!"

He dropped his oilskins again to the floor as though waiting for those who might question his prowess. One or two women slipped arms about the now weeping Martha Cryan and led her toward the back of the store.

But, though frowns appeared on many a face, none ventured to express to Foghorn the thoughts that brought them.

This seemed to enrage the man more. He felt that he had been challenged, insulted, outraged, and that there was nothing he could do about it but that very thing of which he had just been so scathingly accused —talk!

He strode angrily after the woman who had humiliated him. One or two cried out in horror at the thought that, in his rage, his huge hands might fall upon her.

She heard him coming and wheeled again to face him:

"I'm glad they left the nets!" she cried. "Glad—an' proud they'd do it fer me! You—you blowhard! You wouldn't even have gone after 'em!"

For the first time in his life Foghorn seemed utterly lost for words.

"They're inside the pier, Martha!" someone called from the front of the store. "Inside an' steamin' in the river!"

They all left the store, willingly braving the wind that slammed the door resoundingly against the wall, in order that they might greet the men whose lives had been spared.

Martha Cryan met her boys as they stepped from the wooden pier at which the tug dory had landed. Her hysteria was gone; her drooping shoulders had squared and in her eyes beamed a light of determined happiness.

No words were spoken. Between her two sons the woman was a pitiably small figure as she slipped an arm about each and turned to face the villagers.

"You left the nets!" Foghorn laughed sneeringly.

But the boys did not notice; nor did the villagers, nor the mother.

"You'll be needin' a warmin' drink," Mrs. Wildon said finally.

With a smile of gratitude the little mother led the way toward the store. The villagers followed; all but Foghorn.

He stood alone, the wind whirling about him and his oilskins flapping under his arm. They had left him; he was a thing apart; a creature in whom none was interested.

HE shrugged his shoulders contemptuously and strode to the wooden pier at which the Cryans had landed. He dropped his oilskins to the beach and swore roundly as the wind whipped them against a boathouse several yards away.

Then his wide hands gripped the gunwale of the boat lying beside the one the Cryans had left and he slid it easily onto the water.

Before the last of the villagers had entered the store, Foghorn had manned the oars and under the impetus of his brawny arms the dory leaped forward.

Straight out Carp River he went, past the land end of Dominion Pier and on toward the mighty combers that filled the lake. His face was filled with flying spray and already his clothes hung clinging about him.

When he reached the range light tower Peter Bright, a look of blank incredulity on his weather-beaten face, shouted out some hail that was swept incoherently into the distances on the raging wind.

It seemed to Foghorn when he broke from the lee of the pier that a million hands had suddenly seized upon his frail craft and were casting it about between them.

One great comber lifted the dory much as though it were a cork, held it aloft for a fleeting moment, then dropped it into a hissing valley of water that seemed possessed of myriad white tongues each of which lapped forth to devour a just morsel.

By a deft oar stroke, rendered with such power that the shoulder of Foghorn's shirt ripped over his straining muscles, he righted the craft, headed it into the rushing seas and smiled contemptuously landward. Down one side of a comber he slid only to be battered by the wall of the next onrushing water mountain.

But he managed. His oars worked only as he sped downward into the valleys; he made no effort to battle the water that lifted him skyward.

In the tower Peter Bright shouted again, ineffectually. His eyes bulged as he watched Foghorn's battle to avoid crashing against the concrete pier. The last Foghorn saw of his partner was when the old man ran to the telephone.

"Call 'em up!" Foghorn bawled then, "call 'em up! An' tell 'em there's a man among 'em! Tell 'em that—or by Gawd, I'll break your witherin' old bones when I come in!"

Water splashed about his feet in the bottom of the storm-lashed dory. Spray that bit deep into his eyes and cheeks was lashed in a ceaseless whirl about him.

Time and again he mastered the careening boat only by the most expert maneuvers and the most prodigious strength. But the pier was slipping back from him; he was gaining.

"Walk away from me, will they!" he bawled again. "Call me a blowhard! Foghorn!—The weaklings!"

HE KNEW about where the nets were. He had seen them just before Peter Bright had relieved him in the tower. He laid a course that would carry him out beyond them so that the wind and seas would wash him down over the buoys and flags denoting their whereabouts.

For his dory he had no fears; but the nets, set out to drift across fish-runs, would soon lash themselves into shreds if they reached the shallows in such a sea.

When he changed his course in accordance with his plan the boat shipped gallons of water. It was cold water and Foghorn, bereft of his oilskins, was already drenched to the skin and chilled to the bone. But he managed the maneuver and that was all that mattered to him.

A hundred feet away he caught sight of a buoy flag. A hundred feet

that, were it measured with the intervening combers leveled, might well reach ten times that distance!

But Foghorn was sure of himself now. His wrenched face was set in a grimace that was half smile and half sneer.

He hated the villagers, suddenly. Hated them with a venom that was not to be denied. He realized, now, that they had silently scoffed him through all those years and that, finally, fate had been kind and awakened him to the truth. He would vent his hate upon them as only he could! He would show them the fools that they were!

The first buoy flag came up under the boat when he reached it. It snapped off short under the impact and he missed his lunge for it. Once again the dory careened perilously and shipped water.

A quick glance over his shoulder showed Foghorn the broken waters that marked the presence of the first ledge of the shallows, and it was but two hundred yards away.

He grabbed overside again and this time his fist gripped the edge of the linen net. He felt the rope binding and, though he could not judge at what point in the long net he had secured a grip, he began hauling it into the boat.

He set his teeth and muttered imprecations against anything that offered an obstacle to his purpose. The wind seemed, suddenly, to be stronger. His breath was more difficult to obtain and he was blinded as continuously as though he were gazing into an opaque glass.

He did not see that the driving rain had come and was beating down upon him mercilessly.

IT WAS an unfair struggle because it was an unequal one. The net, soaked to twice its weight, resisted his efforts like a demon intent upon destroying itself among the beckoning shallows; the dory tossed about in a frenzied switching and darting that left it one moment atop his quarry, and the next yards from it.

But slowly he dragged the dripping linen over the gunwale and the mass about his feet grew higher. Now came a buoy and a flag from the seas, and they brought a hoarse cry from Foghorn, for they told him that he was gaining.

He did not think of the work still ahead—only of that which he had already achieved.

His legs became entangled in the net already hauled. His great hands struck blindly at flopping, wriggling fish whose gills had become enmeshed and whose struggles interfered with his success. Some of these he knocked back into the tumbling lake; others dropped into the boat at his feet and darted about the water there.

Another flag and buoy! The dory was piled high with netting; its sinuous, clinging folds seemed to have taken on the lustre of gold as Foghorn fought on.

"Cowards!" he screamed into the wind and rain. "Quitters!" he bawled back at the pounding waters about him. And into his dripping face there came a sudden look of triumph, of infinite satisfaction.

"I'll show you! Talk, do I? Nothin' but talk—huh!"

And through it all his great arms hauled at the nets and the dory tossed helplessly—and the netting piled higher and higher about his feet.

Only a few yards away loomed the broken waters over the first ledge. Such of the net as he could not get into the boat, Foghorn knew, would constitute a peril should it trail among the rocks and become entangled, thus dragging the dory under. He had nothing with which to cut it away.

Feverishly, like an athlete who

throws the last iota of his power into a mad dash for the tape, Foghorn hauled at the fighting net.

THERE came, suddenly, added resistance and he braced himself against the thwarts and pulled with all his remaining strength.

"She's caught!" he snarled, baffled at the very door of success against the villagers he wanted to punish. "Caught, by Gawd! I'll lose 'er!"

But the net gave a little to his efforts, then took to a jerking back and forth that yanked at his aching arms as a maddened horse might pull at the arms of a wearied driver.

"Sturgeon!" he bellowed. "No—It's a sheepshead!"

Into his raging voice had crept all the disgust that the fresh water fisherman feels toward this despised fish but great fighter. That such a creature should threaten his hard-won victory maddened him.

From behind him boomed the breaking waters and he threw himself blindly into the fight again. Soon a silvery form darted toward the surface of the water not far from the boat.

Its great, black eyes seemed to Foghorn to be leering at him, its gaping mouth, fouled in the mesh of the net, laughing taunts. As it lunged past he felt himself jerked from his feet, his arms aching as though they had been plunged into living fire.

For a moment his eyes cleared and he saw that the linen and the fins of the fisn had cut and torn his hands until they were streaked with red. He shouted demonically, hauled again; and the sheepshead came closer.

"I won't bother drownin' you!" Foghorn snarled over the side. "I'll fix you—quick!"

Somehow he managed to free one hand and seized an oar which he raised overhead as though it had been a feather. Time and again he drove it downward against the body of the fish.

As he felt the contact and saw, close and staring, the bulging, black eyes, something in his mind seemed to snap.

"Go ahead, big eyes!" he shouted, "join in with 'em! Laugh at me! Laugh! I talk, do I? Just talk, huh? Wait'll they see this! Will they laugh then?"

His rasping voice rose in a howling roar of derision and settled back into words that were bitter with hate: "Tell 'em to let men go out on the lake after nets! Men what is men! Tell 'em to git ther'selves a line—an' a hook . . . !"

LONG after the sheepshead had ceased its struggles Foghorn plied the deadly oar with one hand and held the net with the other.

The dory hit the broken water and turned end for end so quickly that Foghorn lost his balance and fell across the gunwale. He rose, after a moment, the oar lost to the waves and his hand hard pressed against his side.

He managed to balance himself, his one hand still gripping the seemingly endless line of net. Then, his jaw hanging low on his chest and his head reeling in partial consciousness, he set up the mechanical hauling again.

Suddenly there came over the stern of the dory another flag and buoy and, resistance to his efforts gone, Foghorn staggered over backward onto the net he had reclaimed and lay very still, his great head jammed hard against the bow thwart.

The dory, whipped by wind and the choppy seas of shallow water, sped like a frightened bird toward

the beach where the surf was shattering itself at the feet of the watching villagers.

LIGHT! From deep shadows wherein Foghorn had seen nothing but great black eyes laughing at him, and wherein he had heard nothing but the shrill taunts of Martha Cryan, there came light.

Foghorn struggled to his feet despite the urgings of the many who had gathered about him. Rem Wildon held a cup to his blue lips and forced him to drink. The fluid was hot and it brought full coherence to Foghorn. He could hear people talking:

"There ain't another man livin' coulda done that!" one of the Cryan boys was saying.

"It's hell out there—we know! Foghorn is a hero! A real hero!"

"He kept us from ruin, that's what he done!" the brother avowed earnestly. "He's the greatest man I ever saw!"

Foghorn's coarse features set into a sneer. He raised his hand and passed it across his dripping face. The hand left streaks of red over the features that gave him the appearance of an ogre. His mighty body swayed uncertainly on feet that were set far apart.

A woman, shawl-wrapped, her cadaverous features streaked with rain and scraggly hair which the wind had whipped free, came falteringly toward him.

A moment she gazed pleadingly into his battered face. Her lips moved as though groping for words. Then she sank to her knees beside him and seized his bleeding hand and pressed her colorless lips against it.

Foghorn looked down upon Martha Cryan. Understanding came to him. He threw back his head and his hated, grating laugh battled the elements for supremacy:

"See?" he bellowed down at her, at the same time jerking his hand free, "are they men? Could I bust 'em in my fingers? Talk, huh? Just talk, is it? Go ahead—weaklin's—call me—Foghorn!"

And the villagers, hushed by they knew not what, stood aghast as they saw that reeling giant turn from them and walk away.

Red Paint

By MADELEINE SHARPS BUCHANAN

A THREE PART STORY—CONCLUSION

CHAPTER XIII

THE SUMMONS

MR. HORNBY'S landlady settled the matter in a trice.

"A dick was up here asking about you and going over your room," she told him with her eyes snapping. "And I don't think much of it. I run a respectable house.

"Whatchu been up to? He wanted to see everything belonging to you and so I remembered that coat you hung out on the line. I was plumb exasperated by that time and I asked him if he would like to see that. I never thought he would, but the crazy fool took it away with him!

"I said I bet you'd give him Old Harry. What would he want with your coat, and your best one, at that? I hope you get it back and I'm awful sorry I mentioned it, but it riled me to have the cops come into my house."

The worst had happened. His turpentine-scented coat was in the hands of the police! It would be like Blakely, who was deep in the thing himself, Hornby knew, to tell the police that Hornby had worn that coat, his best suit, the night before!

And how could he involve Blakely without admitting that he had found the money in Blakely's old, smelly coat? But what good would the money do him if he were in jail, accused of murder.

"I don't know any more about it than you do, Mrs. Brown," he told the irate landlady. "The cops haven't anything on me. I'll go down and get my coat back."

"Them police will do anything," growled Mrs. Brown. "Taking folks' clothes! They think they own the earth. I hope you ain't in any trouble, Mr. Hornby. Nobody in my house ever got in trouble before."

Hornby hoped so, too. But he wasn't so sure. He felt as though he were on his way to the electric chair.

WHILE he was choking down his supper, the curious eyes of a few late comers fastened upon him, Blakely called to see him. The bookstore was not supposed to be left at any time between nine in the morning and midnight. Blakely and Hornby had always arranged their time, and for Blakely to leave the store while the other man was at supper was something that had never happened before.

Everything whiled through Hornby's head as he went along the narrow hall to the musty, unattractive parlor where Blakely awaited him. If his fellow worker had missed the money in the old coat, he had a nerve coming to him about it! But it must be something important, for never before had Blakely come to see him.

"Can we go up to your room?" his grim-faced caller greeted him. And Hornby, glancing at the two or three boarders who had already straggled into the parlor, was forced to consent. His mind was dwelling upon the wad of money that he had stuffed into the torn place in the old chair. He would see to it that Blakely did not sit in that chair!

"Have you left the store alone?" he asked in amazement when he had closed his door. To his relief Blakely pulled out a thin, spidery rocker from the wall.

"Yes." Blakely's narrow eyes were regarding Hornby intently.

"You found that money today in my old coat, didn't you, John? Come across with it."

"Wh-what money?" gasped Hornby.

"The three thousand dollars that Boldinski handed that Lawall woman last night."

"I found it, Blakely?" Hornby opened his eyes very wide. "And in your coat? What do you mean?"

"You found it," snapped Blakely. "I know when. I came out in the back room and caught you right afterward. I knew you had it. Hornby, the man caught with that cash goes to the chair! Are you a fool?"

Hornby gasped. Truly, he had never known this man with whom he had worked for two years!

"I don't—I don't——" he mumbled.

"Listen to me," said Blakely firmly, bending forward. "I was interested in spite of myself in that fool contest next door. You acted like such an ass about it you got me all stirred up. And so I stepped in to see how the thing would come out when the prize money was awarded. I only got as far as the door, for I couldn't keep my eyes off the store, left open like that.

"Well, I saw the Lawall woman get it, and I saw that slick Lemont look at her when she got it. To nobody else would that look have given him away, and maybe not to me, as well as I can read that slick crook, if it hadn't been for the woman.

"She was so flung off her feet when Boldinski handed her that big wad of bills that she threw Lemont just one glance—only one, but it said volumes to me. You know, I said all along the thing was crooked. I kept telling you it was, but you went right on spending your dollars.

"I made up my mind to follow that woman and see where and how she met Lemont. I knew you well enough to guess you wouldn't come back to the store after you'd lost out. And so I just locked up the place and shadowed the Lawall woman."

Hornby, sitting upon the cash that he had taken from Blakely's coat, stared pop-eyed at the other man.

BLAKELY went grimly on. "She wandered around sort of aimless like and I trailed her. I knew she was waiting for the Boldinski store to close. And finally she went down the steps to the beach.

"That got me, for it was cold and dark down there and it looked as

though a storm were coming. A heck of a place for Lemont to meet her—but about the safest, I guess, after all.

"Well, I lost her in the darkness, and I was sneaking along toward the place where I thought she was when, smack! something heavy whizzed past my face. I heard a woman say something, high-pitched and mad. Then I heard a man's voice.

I stooped and felt around for the thing that hit me. It was the three thousand dollars, Hornby, tied in that piece of silk she had put them in."

Hornby said nothing.

"Right after that, I heard a choked kind of scream," resumed Blakely, "and I ran along in the shadows toward the place where it seemed to come from. I brought up against that post, all smeared with wet paint. I smelled the darn stuff and then the sign stared me in the face. But I fell over the woman at the same time.

"And then I heard somebody coming. Hornby, it was you and a girl. I slid away in the darkness and came back to the store. There I saw the paint on the old coat I had on, and I got it off with turpentine.

"I found that I had every bit of the woman's money, the whole three thousand, and I looked about for a hiding place for it. It occurred to me that the pocket of that old coat hanging there in that cluttered-up rear room was the best place. And so I left it there. But the turpentine gave me away to you and you found it.

"Now, Hornby, the thing is this: Lemont without doubt killed that woman, and in her fury she flung the money into the darkness. He never got it. I got it. My story is straight and I can put it over with the police, but how can you fix up yours if the cops find that cash in your room or on you?"

Hornby stared speechlessly into Blakely's grim, expressionless face. The last thing he had expected was to have Blakely make a clean breast of it. Why—he had felt sure Blakely was guilty.

"You were fool enough to go to the woman's hotel," went on the cool voice. "And now they've got that on you. That's bad, Hornby. But if they find the cash here, too, nobody can save you."

Hornby's brain whirled. Evidently no one save himself and the girl as yet knew about his theft of the green-and-gold vase from that dusty lower shelf in her cheap little shop! He could trust the girl. He felt sure. But he might never see her again. She might, being out of the thing, stay out.

"Why would it be better for you to have the cash?" he asked at last. "When I found it today I felt sure you had killed the woman."

Blakely smiled slightly.

"You're not much on reading men, Hornby," he admitted. "Well, I say this cash is nobody's cash. The woman is dead and she didn't guess right, anyhow. She was told. She must have been. Lemont had counted the beads. And nobody else guessed right.

"Boldinski has given the money away and it certainly is not Lemont's. I only say it is not safe for you, in your position, to have it. What shall we do with it? Do you want to keep it?"

"I'll keep it for a while," said Hornby doggedly. "I'll be as frank as you. I've got it. I've hidden it. But I'm in a pretty muddle, because they know that I went to the hotel to see the Lawall woman and the clerk came up here tonight to ask me to bribe him to keep quiet.

"And, besides, I cleaned my coat with turpentine to get off the red paint, and hung it out on the line here to air. A cop was up here today rooting all around my room and he took the coat away with him."

"I figured you'd got into the paint, too," grinned Blakely, "or you would not have been so darn keen about the turpentine and spotted the cash right off. But what under heavens, Hornby, did you go to see that strange Lawall woman for at her hotel?"

Hornby opened his mouth to speak and shut it with a snap. How could he tell anyone why he had gone there? How could he admit that he had known the contest had been crooked, because no one but he himself could have known exactly how many beads were in that green-and-gold vase?

"I went for the same reason that you trailed her," he said at last. "I felt the thing was crooked and I was furious. I hated Lemont, anyhow, and I wanted to get the truth out of the woman. I was going to scare her into paying me some of the money."

"Well, I'll say you did a hick stunt," nodded Blakely. "And so you are going to keep the cash? I don't care where it is, except that I'd like to have a slice of it and I don't intend you to hog it all. I merely came up to tell you my part in the thing and to point out your own position. You must see what the results will be if they find that money in your room or on your person."

"They might say you followed the woman to rob her," said Hornby flatly. "Why wouldn't they?"

"I don't know," replied Blakely, grinning. "Except that it would be a lie. I've got the truth on my side, but I'm darned if I get you yet."

"My story," said Hornby, "is as plausible as yours."

BLAKELY did not get angry. He just sat regarding his fellow worker with that musing smile. And presently——

"Hornby, I got an idea the girl with you last night on the beach was the one you ran away from the day she came into the bookstore," he said. "Am I right? I couldn't swear to it. She saw you beat it and she asked me your name. I thought there was something kind of funny then."

"Well, you won't find out who that girl on the beach was, and that's that!" flared Hornby angrily. "And you can't prove that I was on the beach last night, Blakely."

"Oh, no, but maybe your old coat—pardon me, your best coat—can!" chuckled Blakely. "At an rate, it must be quite as smelly as mine."

Hornby was miserable and bewildered. Blakely was a menace. He saw that now. He was worse than the clerk from the Evelyn Hotel, and he did not know how to cope with him.

"After all," said Blakely, "why were you on the beach last night, John?"

"I haven't said that I was," replied Hornby.

"But I saw you," reminded the other mildly, "you and a girl. I couldn't swear to the girl, but——"

"Are you trying, like the clerk, to scare me into handing you that money?" asked Hornby defiantly.

"Oh, heavens, no!" Blakely shrugged. "But I'm not going to let you have it all, Hornby. Not much. As I said, it is nobody's cash now. If you want to hang onto it until they send you to the chair, go to it. I just dropped in to make a clean breast of it. I've told you how I got it. Give it to me and I'll stick it somewhere until you get out of this. Then we can divide it. Who else owns it?"

"Nobody," said Hornby, eyeing Blakely with suspicion. "But I shan't hand it over to you, Blakely, though you can have half of it when this thing is cleared up. I don't trust you any more than you trust me. Why should I?"

"I don't suppose you would," said

Blakely pleasantly. "We never did hit it off very well."

"And suppose I hand over the cash and tell them where I found it?" went on Hornby, flushed with excitement." I guess two coats can smell of turpentine."

"Well, if you do that, Hornby," said the other man good-naturedly, "you will have a devil of a lot of explaining to do, for I can't make you out yet, and I'm no cop."

Hornby knew this well. And there was Jerry Moore to think of. That girl was a peach. No matter what she thought of him, she knew he was no murderer. She could not think the worst.

There were heavy steps coming up the creaking stairs, along the hall.

Blakely glanced with apprehension at the other man.

"Quick, Hornby, what are you going to do?" he breathed. "I guess they've sent for you."

"Just what I said I'd do," said Hornby doggedly, although he had no idea or plan. "I'll hang fast to the cash, Blakely. You tell if you want. And then I'll tell. And both of us will be in a muddle, I guess."

"If you talk, leave the cash out of it, you fool," grated Blakely as a knock came on the door.

"Mr. Hornby," said the landlady's shrill voice, "that dick that took your coat is here. He says you are to come with him down to headquarters. It's a downright disgrace, here in my respectable house——"

The door opened and a stout, red-faced man peered over the landlady's shoulder. As Blakely rose and picked up his hat, Hornby made a quick movement, one that he would never have thought himself capable of. But as he left the room the three thousand dollars, in its gay little piece of silk, was in his pocket. He was taking no chances on having his room searched, by the police or anyone else

CHAPTER XIV

JERRY MOORE.

POLICE Headquarters in Spray City were located in a building as new as most of the others, and were sandwiched in between a bright crimson fire station and a grim and gray looking bank. It was a freshly painted stucco structure and the office Hornby, Blakely and the plainclothes-man entered was startling with white paint and gay linoleum.

Haddock and the chief of police, one Eli Embury, who had occupied several minor positions in the growing city before he reached his present state of authority, were seated behind a great square desk. Boldinski and Victor Lemont sat near them.

Hornby was not surprised to see these two, although the sight of Lemont's smug expression infuriated him. Nor was he especially alarmed when his eyes fell upon Hoover, the clerk from the dead woman's hotel.

But he got a distinct shock when his quick glance took in the slight, stylish figure of Jerry Moore at the end of the desk, her chin in her two palms, her elbows on the desk, her bright eyes sending unmistakable encouragement to him.

"We should get the truth out of these folks now, chief," nodded Boldinski, rubbing his fat hands together. "This girl here, she guessed there were three thousand four hundred and five beads in the vase, and Hornby guessed once that there were three thousand four hundred and ten—and on his other ticket it says three thousand four hundred and nine. Nobody else, except Lora Lawall, came that near to the right guess.

"And here we have Hornby all mixed up in the crime and the girl knowing Hornby! I tell you, something is wrong. If you handle this

right, chief, you'll find out you've got the truth right here."

Hornby looked past the girl at Lemont and for a fleeting instant he caught a queer expression in the eyes of the man he so thoroughly disliked.

It dawned upon Hornby what it meant, that look.

Lemont knew how many beads had been in the vase, and he knew that John Hornby had guessed right. He knew, too, that Jerry Moore had also come close to the real truth. But to Hornby had belonged that cash prize, as far as Lemont knew. With his own brain that of a crook, how would Lemont figure that Hornby had guessed the exact number of beads in the vase?

He would decide that Hornby had tried some trick of his own, that he had seen through Lora Lawall's and his (Lemont's) trick, and had gone to the woman's hotel to scare some of the prize money out of her.

Yes, if anyone save Jerry Moore knew the real reason for his calling at the Evelyn, it was Lemont. To keep himself out of it, it was up to Lemont to involve Hornby.

"You should find out," went on Boldinski impatiently, "who has that three thousand dollars I gave the Lawall woman. Then we'll have our man."

This was not pleasant hearing for Hornby, who had the money at that moment in his pocket. He did not look at Blakely, whose sarcastic grin he felt.

"Somebody who was in my store, somebody who was interested in that contest, killed the woman," ran on Boldinski. "It was one of my little five-dollar stilettos that are on top of the middle case that did the trick. You know that, chief. Somebody just palmed one of them and lay for her when she left with the cash. Find that cash, I say."

"WHY DON'T you question your man Lemont?" asked Jerry Moore with fine scorn. "He knew the dead woman. I came up here of my own accord to tell you that. I've seen them together, I tell you. The contest was fixed so that the woman got that cash, Boldinski, whether you knew it or not."

"I have said that I never knew Miss Lawall in my life," said Lemont evenly.

"And I believe him!" shouted Boldinski, very red in the face. "Nobody can say that bead contest wasn't straight! I counted the beads myself. I——"

"Well, so did Lemont!" Jerry Moore curled her lip. "And he slipped the number to the woman who wrote it on her ticket and handed it in. It was a cinch. Lemont was going to get half her cash, I guess, but it my opinion he got it all."

Lemont lost a bit of his self-control. He flung a venomous glance at the girl.

"Where do you come into this, accusing me of murder?" he demanded.

"I just wanted them to know that you knew the woman," shrugged Jerry.

Evidently they had been over this ground before Hornby came in, for the chief waved Jerry Moore aside.

"Now, Hornby, we'll have your story," he said grimly. "We have a coat of yours here that smells to high heaven of fresh turpentine. What did you take off it—*paint?*"

JERRY MOORE was not to be put aside. She flung out one firm little hand.

"Say, listen, and I'll tell you what was on his coat," she said tartly; "it was paint all right, fresh paint, and I took it off myself with turpentine! He got it off that post down on the beach near the place where the Lawall woman was killed.

"Mr. Hornby and me, we took a walk last night on the sand and we heard her yell, and we beat it back there under the boardwalk. But when we got there, she was dead. We fell over her, honest we did, and we were two scared people.

"When we got to my store, for we beat it right away, you can bet, I saw that paint on his coat and I took it off. Anybody would. He can tell you the rest."

Hornby drew a long breath. He had not known what to do or say or what was the wisest course, but the girl in her quick way had shown him. Honesty, in her opinion, then, was best.

But it was plain that the part the green-and-gold vase had played in the matter was to be kept dark. Jerry Moore's shy glance as she talked had hinted that they were lovers.

"You — you two were on the beach!" snapped the chief.

"Sure we were and so was somebody else," nodded Jerry. "The bird that killed Lora Lawall and took her cash."

Lemont laughed shortly.

"Why, the girl has confessed!" he said. "They finished her, chief, between them, and took her money. They came closest to winning the cash themselves. You heard what Boldinski said about the numbers on their tickets. They snatched up that knife and followed her."

"Miss Moore wasn't with Hornby when he stopped at the hotel," offered Hoover.

"Waiting for him on the pavement, most likely," sneered Lemont.

"But why?" asked Jerry sweetly. "If we wanted to follow and kill the woman for her money, all we had to do was trail her. I know why Mr. Hornby went to the hotel. I had told him I'd seen the woman with Lemont and that the contest was a crook trick. He went up there to face her with it."

HORNBY drew a great breath of relief. How that girl had thought the thing out! Without involving him in anything crooked, she was pointing out the only way of escape for him—apparent truth and honesty.

That was the only reason he could have given for being at the woman's hotel. And it was the true one, after all. But without the girl he could never have said it. She was a brick!

"Suppose you let Hornby speak for himself," snapped the chief angrily. He had never handled an important case and he was a bit clumsy about it. Jerry Moore's manner took him off his feet.

"I have nothing more to say," said Hornby quietly. "Miss Moore has told you all there is to tell. Of course, I can go over our experience last night in detail if you wish."

"Go ahead," nodded the chief shortly.

It was easy then. All he had to do was follow the lead Jerry had given him and as he came to the awful moment when he heard that choked scream and stumbled over the body, he saw that he had his audience with him. They believed him.

"I don't suppose you saw anything of the three thousand?" asked Boldinski sarcastically.

"You bet we didn't," said Hornby feelingly. "We just beat it, didn't we, Jerry?"

Jerry Moore nodded, her lashes hiding her expression.

"What made you think the Lawall woman was in a plot with Lemont?" asked Detective Haddock suddenly. He had not spoken, and he had made Hornby vaguely uncomfortable, just lounging in the corner, smoking and watching.

"Jerry had told me she had seen the two together," said Hornby glibly.

"And why did you go to the woman's hotel?"

"I was going to get the truth out of her," said Hornby. "I came near to getting that prize money myself and I was mad. I had never had any use for Lemont. He seemed to me to be a slick guy."

"And how did you know where the woman was stopping?"

"I heard her tell a reporter," said Hornby quickly.

"And you were going to make her give you some of that cash to keep quiet?" asked Haddock smoothly.

"Maybe I was," replied Hornby with defiance. "But anyhow, that was no worse than what you did—sending Hoover to my rooms to get me to bribe him to keep quiet about something he had already told you."

"I guess," said Blakely, rising, "I had better be getting back to the book store."

"Not before you tell them about your own coat, Blakely, hanging in the rear room of the store and smelling of turpentine!" flared Hornby unexpectedly. "You've got a story to tell and you're going to tell it!"

As Blakely turned from the door, his eyes met Hornby's and for a moment both men stared at each other in a clash of wills. Neither man dared, the other knew, to mention that three thousand dollars which had once been in Blakely's pocket, and which was now in Hornby's!

CHAPTER XV

JERRY'S INSPIRATION

"JUST a minute," said Haddock sharply, "before we get any more stories. Mr. Hornby, you were on the beach at the time of the crime; did you see nothing, hear nothing suspicious? Nothing that will help us to identify the criminal, who must have been close to you?"

"Not a thing," said Hornby positively.

"And you, Miss Moore? Think carefully. Try to remember every detail of that moment, everything about you. Did Hornby strike matches?"

"Yes," nodded Jerry, wrinkling her brows, "yes, several."

"You saw nothing that will help us, heard nothing?"

"Not a thing," said Jerry slowly.

"Yet you noted that post painted red, the wet paint. You knew there was a sign on it that said 'wet paint'?"

"Yes," Jerry nodded, and now her eyes grew bright. "I saw the sign. I had a flashlight, and I looked at it."

Hornby said nothing. He had not been with Jerry Moore when he had found the body, when he had run into that wet paint on the post. But she evidently did not see any use in telling the police that. That would have necessitated explaining what Hornby had been doing on the beach alone and why she had been there alone. It was not hard for people to accept the story of a man and a maid together on the deserted beach. But each of them alone at that hour? That was another story.

"And yet you saw and heard nothing suspicious?" went on Haddock.

"No," but now the light was growing in Jerry's eyes and she was getting flushed and a bit breathless. Haddock saw it.

"You have recalled something?" he asked gently.

"Yes—I have a hunch," nodded the girl quickly, but the detective lifted his hand.

"All right. It will keep. We will hear what Mr. Blakely has to say about his coat."

"I didn't think it was necessary to tell about that since I can't help in any way," said Blakely with a shrug as he sat down again. "But Hornby ran up against my old coat in the rear room

of the bookstore today and I guess his mind was on his own turpentine scented coat, because he jumped on me about it tonight when I called at his rooms. I'll tell it if you wish, but before I do, I must say that I can't help this investigation any."

"Go on," snapped the chief.

"I had no time for this fool bead contest," began Blakely with a sneer at Boldinski and Lemont. "I knew it was crooked from the start. But Hornby here, working with me every day, got all excited about it and was dead sure he would win that cash. He went in to look at the vase all the time.

"I kidded him some, but he kept at it until he got me interested enough to go to the door of the Boldinski store and see who did get that money. I knew it wouldn't be Hornby. I figured it would work back to Boldinski or Lemont somehow.

"Well, when I saw the Lawall woman get the three thousand, I got the look she gave Lemont. She couldn't help that one look. There was joy and triumph in it. She was wild when she grabbed that wad of cash in her hands. But the look gave them both away to me, and I determined to follow the woman and see when and where she would meet Lemont. When she went down the steps to the beach I was on her heels.

"I lost her in the darkness and I located her after I heard a woman say something, shrill and excited, and a man's voice answer. Then she screamed and I ran headlong toward the place where the sound came from. It was then I brought up smack against that post wet with paint."

As Blakely's grim voice drawled on, absolute silence reigned in the office. The chief was staring at the man in amazement. But Haddock kept his eyes on Jerry, whose face alternately flushed and paled.

"I heard somebody coming," resumed Blakely, "and I saw that it was Hornby and a girl. I beat it away from there then, you can bet, and got back to the store and cleaned that paint off my coat. I can't help you in any way, for that is every last thing I saw or heard. I wasn't going to tell it, but Hornby insisted."

"Great snakes!" exploded the chief disgustedly, "was everybody on the beach last night? And deaf and blind, all of you?"

"Just a minute," said Haddock sharply. "You heard a man's voice, Mr. Blakely. Was there nothing familiar about it?"

"Oh, absolutely not!" shrugged Blakely. "It was just a voice. The wind was blowing. At first I will admit the thought of Hornby popped into my mind—I don't know why. But when I saw him soon afterward I didn't see how the voice I had heard could be his."

JERRY Moore's keen eyes noted the smile that flitted across Lemont's face and she felt her temper rising. These men needed somebody to be the goat and they had picked on Hornby. And Hornby was no match for them.

"I don't know why the thought of Hornby's association with that woman should have occurred to you," said Haddock smoothly. "I think you said that it was because of a conspiracy you suspected between Lemont and her that you followed her."

"Yes, it was," admitted Blakely coolly. "I don't know what made me think of Hornby."

As the indignant Hornby stared at his fellow worker, his arm pressed against that three thousand in his pocket. If he had anything to do with it, Blakely should never see any of that money! Let him try to get it.

He would not dare hint that it was on Hornby's person, or the cash would be lost to both of them. Yet Blakely

must have an idea that he carried it with him.

Hornby's lips, too, were sealed regarding the damning prize money which he had found in Blakely's old turpentine-saturated coat. If he spoke of that, and involved Blakely, he must tell about his own part in it, the worst of which none but Jerry Moore knew.

"Before we go any further with this," said the girl quietly, "will you come down to the beach with me, Mr. Haddock—just Mr. Hornby and you? To the scene of the crime, I mean. I have a hunch. It may not come to anything, but it may be mighty important."

"We have been over every inch of that ground thoroughly," said the chief.

"I know, but—well, if you won't come with me, I'll go alone!" flashed Jerry. "There is something I just remembered."

Hornby looked at her eagerly, but her small face was turned from him and he could make nothing of her expression.

"I'm holding Hornby for the inquest," said the chief importantly.

"He won't get away if Mr. Haddock goes with us," pleaded Jerry. "But it's all right. I'll go down there alone if no one will come with me. Only I don't want to run any chance of somebody that's interested chasing after me and snatching the thing I'm going to find."

Haddock was a smarter man than the chief. He read women as well as men and now he decided that somebody had better pay attention to Jerry Moore.

"I'll take charge of Hornby," he said shortly as he rose. "Come on, Miss Moore. If there is any way to help us out in this, we need it."

"I'll hold you responsible, Haddock," snorted the chief. "Those two are pals. They were on the beach last night and they——"

"Ask them all to wait here until we get back," said Jerry with flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes.

CHAPTER XVI

WHAT JERRY FOUND

AS Hornby followed Haddock and the slight figure of the girl up the boardwalk and at last down the wooden steps that he had descended to the sands the night before, the green-and-gold vase bumping against his shaky legs, he had small hope for himself. Hoover, the hotel clerk, was against him, and if Blakely could harm him he would.

He was going to be held for the inquest, and that was a horrible thing—next-door to being convicted of murder.

When he thought of Lemont a surge of hot rage flashed over him. He had hated Lemont from the start, and with good cause.

It was much warmer than it had been the night before, and the beach under the boardwalk where the woman had been killed was deserted. Having, to his way of thinking, exhausted the scene of the crime, the chief had not even bothered to set a guard there.

It was not a big, important case—and what, anyhow, could a strip of sand tell a man? Nothing in this case, the chief was convinced.

Hornby shivered as they approached the spot, but the girl went eagerly on, Haddock at her heels.

"I don't know what you expect to find," said the detective at last. "But I'm willing to give a couple of lovers a chance. I think myself Hornby is getting a raw deal."

"This is good of you," said Jerry earnestly, "and I hope I'm right. It is only a hunch I had and I got it

while I was looking at a dirty old calendar on the chief's spotless white wall up there in the office."

"A calendar!"

"Yes," said Jerry eagerly. "Oh, suppose that bright idea of mine is right!"

Hornby was puzzled. He had no notion himself of what the thing could be that had brought Jerry Moore back to the scene of the murder they had both stumbled upon the night before. He had seen nothing that could have been of any value. And besides, the police, with this keen man at their heels, had been over the ground since. Jerry, bless her, meant well, but——

"IT IS here!" said the girl at this moment with a gasp of relief. "Oh, my goodness! I was afraid you or somebody else had taken it away!"

And as Haddock turned on his flashlight they saw that she was unfastening from the string that held it about the painted post the cardboard that said "Wet paint."

"This is the thing I came for," she said earnestly. "And if you will hold that flash close I'll show you what I saw last night—the thing that came back to me like lightning in the chief's office just now."

With Hornby and Haddock bending close, the powerful flashlight of the detective turned down upon the smeared and limp bit of cardboard, Jerry Moore pointed to one of the red smudges on the sign.

"Did you think these were all just bits of paint, left by the careless man who printed this sign and stuck it up?" she asked earnestly. "So did I. So would anybody—and nobody would be likely to give them a thought.

"But here is one that isn't paint! It is a red finger-print, I'll bet a hat, and it was made by blood! When you questioned me just now about whether I had seen anything suspicious down here last night, I was looking at that dirty calendar on the white wall and thinking how queer it was for it to be there when everything else was so clean. And I saw some black, smudgy finger-prints or thumb-prints on it!

"Right then the clear picture of this old 'wet paint' sign popped up before my eyes and I saw this thing that had been back in my brain somewhere ever since last night—this red finger-print that I bet was never made by a painted finger! Look, isn't it a beauty? I don't know much about finger-prints, but I'd say that this would point to the criminal all right. He staggered against this post after he had killed the woman—and he put his hand on this sign.

"But he didn't get wet, red paint off the sign onto his hand, I guess. He left wet, red blood on this sign, instead! Anyhow, this is enough, or it ought to be, if I am right, to scare the criminal into confessing, Mr. Haddock!"

HADDOCK took the cardboard sign and bent closely above it. His lean face flushed.

"It won't be any trouble to learn whether this mark was made by paint or blood, Miss Moore," he said briskly. "It is a decided finger-print. If it was made by paint, it may still be evidence. We will take the prints of the men in the office; also Mr. Hornby's and yours. This is a smart bit of work on your part, and I give you my word I paid no attention to this little sign! Which was a bad bit of work on my part."

Hornby was staring at the thing Haddock's flashlight was turned upon. He knew that he himself had not touched that sign with his hands. Or the post either. And Jerry Moore knew it! But what a girl to see a thing like that at a moment like that, and remember it!

"Of course," said Haddock as they walked down the beach, the sign held carefully in his hands, "this print may have been made by any disinterested party. It is too high for a child to reach, but anyone on the beach——"

"I know," said Jerry, "but it wouldn't be likely for a disinterested party to make it in blood, would it?"

"It would not," said Haddock grimly. "And I intend to do my best with it."

As they ascended the wooden steps to the boardwalk, Jerry Moore pressed close against Hornby.

"Cheer up," she whispered. "I bet this finger-print will settle the thing!"

"You're a wonder," Hornby whispered back again.

All the way to the police station his heart was singing, while his knees shook. Suppose this was nothing, after all! Well, he would find some way to keep that three thousand from Blakely. He would not dare tell about taking that cash from Blakely's old coat. There was enough against him already, heaven knew, if this finger-print stuff turned out to be of no value!

It was a kind of comfort to know that he had that money, even if having it meant peril. He slipped his hand into his pocket for the reassuring feel of the wad of bills tied in Lora Lawall's bit of gay silk, and he stopped dead, on the steps of headquarters, a green pallor creeping over his face.

His pocket was empty. The three thousand dollars were gone!

CHAPTER XVII

THE PRINT

BOLDINSKI, Lemont, Hoover and Blakely still sat fidgeting in the chief's office when Haddock, the girl and the weak-kneed Hornby walked in.

Haddock went directly to the chief's desk and spread before him the wet paint sign.

"See that finger-print on that?" he asked, jabbing his own stubby thumb on the mark. "Well, we've got a hunch it was made by the criminal and that it is not paint, but blood. See the different red it is? I don't have to be an expert chemist to get that."

The chief stared, pop-eyed, at the limp cardboard.

"Gosh!" he said under his breath. "This will be a giveaway all right, Haddock. Did the girl think of this?"

"Yes," nodded Jerry Moore, "and I remembered it when I looked at that dirty old calendar up there on your clean white wall. See the finger marks on it?"

"Well, I'll be darned!" said the chief, his face flushing.

"What is it?" asked Boldinski eagerly.

The men gathered about the cardboard spread upon the chief's desk, and Jerry Moore pushed her slight body in between Blakely and the detective, her slim finger pointing to the crimson smudges on the little sign.

"My brain just kind of photographed that unknown to me," she said simply. "And tonight, looking at that old calendar with its dirty finger-marks, it came back."

"To think of my missing that!" groaned Haddock. "Whether it means anything or not, the idea of my passing that up!"

"I should call that smart," said Boldinski, rubbing his hands. "Very smart!"

Hornby leaned against the side of the desk, pale and shaky. Since he had discovered that the cash was gone from his pocket the earth seemed to have fallen from under him. Where could that wad be? Who had

stolen it, or how had he lost it? Had it returned to the scene of the crime after all, and was it now upon that sand where the body had lain?

There was something about that thought that made him shudder. And yet he would have gone back to the spot, that night, if he could have managed it! He had dared so much and risked so much and suffered so much for that money!

"It will be easy for us to find whether this is blood or paint," the chief was saying. "I should say right now it is blood. But we will take the finger-prints of everyone here and we won't lose any time about it."

"Take Lemont's," said Hornby suddenly. "He's the man."

LEMONT, his face as white as chalk, turned suddenly upon Boldinski.

"Say, look here, I'll tell you the truth about that old vase contest," he blurted out. "Just to prove that I never killed Lora Lawall! I didn't, I tell you! I wasn't on the sand last night. I heard her scream before I got down there. And that's straight."

"What?" Boldinski roared. "Are you telling me you are crooked, Victor, that my contest was run crookedly? It that it?"

"I knew Lora," said Lemont dully and sank back in his chair. "We have worked this thing at several small seaside resorts, wherever we could pull it. It was easy enough. I got a chance to count the beads—with you trusting me, it was a cinch. Then I slipped in three extra ones, for fear somebody else was onto the right number. I did that after the vase was no longer on exhibition.

"I told Lora how many there were in the vase and she turned in her ticket late marked with that number. I was to meet her on the beach and get a wad of the cash. Her share was a thousand dollars. We always worked it that way.

"But before I got to the sand, I heard her scream. It was awful. I didn't dare go down. I was too scared. I went home and walked around my room all night.

"I knew Lora had been killed for the cash. And that is all I know about it. You won't find my finger-print on that sign, because I wasn't near the sand!"

"Then why did you tell us this?" snapped the chief. "If you are not afraid this is your finger-print, why did you say anything about this crook game of yours?"

"He killed her!" screamed old Boldinski. "I know it! Of course he did. To think of my trusting him, believing in him—the crook! The murderer! Don't let him get away! If this gets out that my contest was run crooked, I'll be ruined!"

"Oh, we'll get the man now," said the chief calmly. "Just don't get excited."

"Say, from this minute I offer a thousand dollars reward to the man or woman who catches this murderer!" shouted Boldinski, his face very red. "And the murderer is this crook I've trusted, this Lemont! You get his finger-prints and you'll find out! Oh, what a fool I was!"

"You finger-print them, Haddock," nodded the chief. "I guess we've got the criminal right here, all right. Everybody in Spray City couldn't have been on that sand last night!"

"But where is that three thousand?" roared Boldinski. "That is my money now. It was handed out crookedly. I say, if you find that money, you find the murderer."

HORNBY sat looking at the floor. He, at any rate, no longer had the three thousand. Calamity had certainly befallen him, unless the chief took the notion to search them all.

He would probably have been searched if they had held him for the inquest.

But what had become of that money? It had been in his pocket while he was in the office, that he was sure.

One by one, Lemont and Blakely with a rather ill grace, submitted to being finger-printed. Haddock examined the prints with a slight grin.

"I sure got them good, chief," he said. "Rolled and plain. And just cast your eyes on them, and then take a squint at this print Miss Moore found for us on the wet paint sign."

Boldinski rose and stood before the door.

"There's no man that is so smart that he can get away from me!" he said, glaring at Lemont. "Crook, murderer! A lot of good it done you, juggling with my beads!"

Haddock and the chief of police were bending above the limp cardboard sign and the finger-prints Haddock had just taken.

Jerry Moore's bright eyes sped from Blakely to Hornby and on to Lemont. Once she bestowed a long, keen glance on Hoover, who sat uneasily in a corner, plainly wishing that he had stayed out of the entire affair.

"Blakely, in our minds there is no doubt whatever that this finger-print on the wet paint sign is yours," said the chief at last. "What have you got to say about it? Finger-prints don't lie."

"Of course, we can prove that later to everyone's satisfaction," said Haddock. "But these are the same prints or I'm a shad."

BLAKELY shrugged. He seemed in nowise disturbed, and Hornby glanced at Jerry Moore. He was afraid that even then, with real evidence at hand, the thing might fall through. And that three thousand had been taken out of, or had fallen from his pocket! Ever since he had discovered that he had been in a daze.

"If that print is mine, then I fancy I struck my hand against the post," Blakely said evenly. "You can't prove I killed that strange woman because I put my finger on some wet paint near the body. I've told you I was on the beach. I've made a clean breast of it."

"Oh, why fool with him?" demanded Boldinski. "Lemont is the man. He killed the woman, his accomplice. Lemont has got my three thousand hid somewhere!"

"I didn't kill Lora and I haven't got your three thousand!" flared Lemont furiously. "You can't make a murderer out of me! I tell you all, I wasn't on the sand last night."

"And I told you I bumped smack into that post with its wet paint and its sign and got it on my coat," said Blakely. "What does that finger-print tell you? It's bunk."

"Not if it is made in blood," said the chief grimly. "And it looks to me as though it were, all right. You forgot to tell us you touched the woman, Blakely."

John Hornby was staring at his fellow worker. What a fool he had been not to have guessed the hidden depths in that sarcastic, unpleasant person's make-up long ago! But to think that Blakely had killed that strange woman for the cash—killed her before Lemont, her accomplice, could meet her and get the bulk of it!

"I did not touch the woman," said Blakely, still undisturbed. "I've told you the plain truth and I didn't have to tell you that."

"You bet you did," said Hornby hotly. "I wasn't going to let you get away with that, Blakely!"

"Well, we are satisfied, at any

rate, that this is Blakely's finger-print on the cardboard sign," said Haddock. "And to my thinking it was marked on it in blood, not wet paint. Blakely doesn't care to make a clean breast of it and so——"

"I've told you all I can," said Blakely pleasantly.

Hornby, seething with his own helplessness, suddenly felt the certainty, crazy as it seemed, that Blakely was guilty. Blakely all along had laughed at his enthusiasm about the bead contest next-door, had sneered at him and jeered at him, up until the morning after the affair—when he had known, even at that moment, that in his old turpentine-scented coat in the rear room the three thousand dollar prize money was hidden!

And yet Hornby could say nothing more. Even with the cash gone from his own pocket, his lips were sealed regarding Blakely. He could never tell that he found that money in Blakely's old coat. This realization was agony.

AND THEN Jerry Moore spoke.

"After all, the money the woman got so unfairly was the motive," she said quietly. "That was what she was killed for, by Lemont her accomplice, or someone else. And as Mr. Boldinski says, I think we should find the money. One of these men must have it.

"To my way of thinking, that finger-print on the wet paint sign is proof that Blakely killed the woman. He told us only half the story. Why not search Blakely for that three thousand?"

"The girl has a grand little head!" said Boldinski excitedly. "Sure, by all means search that man for my money! His finger has already give him away! If he hasn't got it, then Lemont has, the dirty crook! Oh, the way I trusted that man!"

Perhaps a glance passed from Jerry's wide, innocent eyes to the keen eyes of Haddock. No one will ever know. At any rate, the detective rose and walked toward Blakely, who sat regarding him with a disgusted sneer.

"Stand up and let me go over you, Blakely," said Haddock sharply. "If you haven't got the cash on you, I guess we can make you tell us where it is."

"Search me all you wish," shrugged Blakely, and Hornby's heart sank, for none knew better than he did that the three thousand was not in Blakely's pocket.

Rising nonchalantly, Blakely submitted his long, lean body to be searched. And there was no one in the office more astounded than he was when Haddock's rapid fingers brought to light, in one of his sagging coat pockets, a wad of bills bound by a rubber band and rolled in a gay little strip of silk!

"My three thousand!" screamed Boldinski, rushing forward. "It is! I saw her wrap it in that silk thing when I handed it to her."

Blakely's face fell and the color drained from it while he stood staring blankly at that money the detective had taken from his pocket.

As for Hornby, he was sure he was dreaming. How had the cash skipped from his coat to Blakely's since they had come to police headquarters? He had been careful not to get near Blakely. And the man's face showed that he had not known the money was in his coat. No that that had any weight with the police. They had evidence enough now.

Hornby's wandering gaze encountered that of Jerry Moore, and straight into his bewildered eyes that young woman smiled, radiantly.

Hornby woke up. He remembered Jerry's soft body pressed against his as they ascended the steps from

the sands a short time since. He recalled the way she had shoved herself in beside Blakely when they had all gathered about the chief's desk to examine the cardboard sign.

Good heavens—Jerry had taken the cash from him and planted it on Blakely! And that before she knew the story the finger-prints had to tell!

CHAPTER XVIII.

BOLDINSKI'S GIFT

"WELL, well. I guess this is about all," said the chief, with a delighted grin. "Are you ready to confess, Blakely? Coming here with that money in your pocket certainly took nerve. You will recall that in your story you said nothing about the cash the woman won."

"I don't know how that money got in my coat pocket," said Blakely, staring about the room and biting his lip. His eyes fell upon Hornby, who was smiling happily.

Hornby knew that Blakely could not mention his having had the three thousand, without telling that in the first place Hornby had taken it out of his turpentine-scented coat in the rear room of the book store. Yes, it was a pretty muddle! But suppose Blakely broke and told the whole thing?

He doesn't know how it got into his coat!" chuckled Boldinski.

"I am going to hold you for the murder of Lora Lawall, Blakely, and you can talk or shut up, as you please," snapped the chief.

"It would have pleased me more and been more reasonable if you had found this crook Lemont guilty," said Boldinski. "Still, boys, I won't complain. You got my money back for me."

Hornby's brain was working busily now. Suppose Blakely confessed? What could he say save that Hornby had found the money in his coat and had taken it? Had refused to give it to him when he called for it that night? But would the police believe that Hornby had brought the three thousand to police headquarters on his person and then made Blakely a present of it?

But Jerry Moore. What a girl! What a smart little trick she was. But he had known that the night he had stolen her vase and she had asked him if a lantern would not do as well for him as a flashlight.

And these people—they thought they were lovers. What could be sweeter? If he ever got out of this—and old Boldinski had offered a thousand dollars reward—but Jerry would get that——

Blakely, however, was no fool and he kept his nerve. He knew that they had him, but he saw no reason to make a scene about it.

"I tell you, I don't know how that money got in my pocket just now," he said quietly. "But I did take it from the woman. I killed her for it. I don't have to wait until one of your experts tells you that that finger-print of mine is marked in blood on the wet paint sign. It probably is. I didn't know that I had put my hand against the white sign when I staggered up against the post after I had killed her. Honestly I didn't, or you can bet that sign would not have stayed where it was!"

Hornby braced himself; Blakely was going to drag him into it What would he care whom he pulled down with him in the crash? Thank heaven he knew nothing about the green-and-gold vase! Nothing about his own stunt and the girl's, too, to win that money!

"I TOLD you Hornby got my goat raving about that bead contest of Boldinski's," went on Blakely sullenly. "He got me all worked up about that cash prize. I went in a couple of

times and looked at Lemont and I knew men well enough to guess he wouldn't let that three thousand slide under his slick fingers. And so I just kept calm and I didn't even buy a ticket. I just watched Lemont.

"And the night of the contest it was like I told you. I saw that between the woman who had won and Lemont there was collusion. And so I grabbed off one of those little stilettos Boldinski has a case of in the middle of the store and I made up my mind I would scare that cash out of the woman. And so I followed her.

"When she went down under the boardwalk where she was going to meet her pal, Lemont, I slid a handkerchief over my face and walked up to her. I let her see the knife and I told her to hand over the money.

"She was a spitfire. She wasn't afraid at first. And then she put up a fight, and when she let out a yell I gave it to her good, not meaning to—but she had me desperate by then, because she had torn that handkerchief off my face the first claw she made. I knew she would have to die then, because she had the goods on me.

"It would have taken time and cash for me to prove that she and Lemont were pals. I knew they were clever ones. Well, I heard somebody coming and I got the money out of her bag where I'd seen her put it at Boldinski's.

It was then I got blood on my hand and I ran smack into the post when I turned to beat it, for a man and a girl were coming. I could see the man plain and the girl's figure some way behind him. I was scared. I got away. That's all—that is, all of that."

Blakely flung Hornby a malicious glance.

"I cleaned my coat with turpentine when I found the paint on it," he resumed," and I decided that the best place for the money was in a pocket of that old coat that hung in the rear room of the book store. Well, Hornby, smelling that turpentine and having his own coat on his brain, I guess, found the money in the pocket of my coat and took it."

"A pretty fairly tale," sneered the chief. "And then, I suppose, it got homesick for you and flew into your pocket while we all were sitting here? Or did Hornby, feeling sorry for you, slip it back?"

"Honest, I have no idea how that money got in my coat tonight," said Blakely earnestly. "And that's the truth. I went to Hornby's room to ask him for the money and he laughed at me. He wouldn't give it to me. And then they came for him and I trotted along, because I felt certain that Hornby had the cash on him and I wasn't going to let him out of my sight. I had done too much to get that money."

"Oh, come, that's too thin," grinned Haddock. "How, then, did the money get out of Hornby's pocket into yours?"

"I don't know," said Blakely helplessly. "That's got me. Hornby, are you going to sit there and say you never took that money out of my old coat in the rear room of the book store?"

Hornby thought a moment. If he denied that he had ever had the money, he had nothing to lose. Jerry had dared a lot to get that money out of his pocket and into the one where it really belonged. Was he going to fail her? There was enough on Blakely without his evidence.

On the other hand, if he admitted that he had taken the money, what good would that do? It would brand him a thief and drag Jerry into it and lead to endless explanations. And so, for once, John Hornby used his head and did the sensible thing.

"You're crazy, Blakely," he shrug-

ged. "I never saw that three thousand dollars and you know it. I don't know what you are talking about."

Over Jerry's face there drifted a beatific smile. Hornby knew he had done the right thing. Why get mixed up with a confessed murderer?

"Well, of all the cold-blooded liars!" shouted Blakely roused for once from his lethargy. "Hornby, you know you——"

"Be yourself," advised Hornby tartly. "If I'd had that cash, you fool, and wanted to keep it, do you think I'd have brought it here tonight and handed it back to you?"

"You would if you thought they were going to hold you for the inquest or maybe search us all!" cried Blakely.

"I haven't been near you anyhow," said Hornby coldly.

"Say, if Hornby had had the cash he would have paid it to me last night to keep my mouth shut about his calling at Miss Lawall's hotel," spoke up Hoover. "He was badly scared at the mess he'd got in and I know if he had had it he would have paid me, like you guys told me he would."

"I was a fool," said Hornby meekly, "for hating Lemont like I did and getting so plumb mad when I saw that he and the woman were together. Of course, Jerry had told me she'd seen them. And then when the money was handed out——"

"Hornby," said Blakely grimly, "I'll get you for this—I'll get back at——"

The chief jerked his head to Haddock.

"Take him out of here," he said, and Blakely, swearing at Hornby and hanging back, was led from the room.

BOLDINSKI rose and walked across to Jerry Moore. He put out one fat little hand.

"I'll give you that thousand," he grinned. "You've earned it. You are one smart girl, smart as any I've ever seen. You saved your lover tonight, eh? You get that thousand.

"And you, Hornby"—he swung upon the embarrassed young man who had eyes now for no one but Jerry Moore—"you will get it, I guess, when you marry her. A rug you two shall have, when that day comes. And, if you should ask Boldinski, a mighty fine rug!

"But now, Hornby, I've got a sense of humor. I'll give you that green-and-gold vase that made all this fuss. I give it to you for keeps. It is a valuable vase, and odd—you bet. There's not another like it in Spray City or anywhere else."

"That's mighty fine of you, Mr. Boldinski," stammered Hornby, blushing, afraid he would laugh hysterically in Boldinski's face.

The green-and-gold vase! Great heavens!

But when Boldinski turned to the chief for a moment, Jerry's soft hand crept into Hornby's and he looked deep into her laughing eyes.

"We could put one on each side of the parlor mantel!" said she demurely.

The Joke On Lummick

By WALLACE M. SLOANE

NATHAN LUMMICK had lived thirty-three years. He had eaten, drunk, slept and played like other men, and worked mostly on routine work—a drudgery to which he had felt he was not adapted on the ground that he deserved something better.

He had not been fond of drudgery, and part of his spare time had been spent in perfecting novel and plausible money-making schemes. He had always felt that some time something would happen and he would find himself suddenly rich.

Now he was dead. At first he could hardly realize that grim fact, but he had been dead three minutes—that is, if he had died instantly. It had been four o'clock when he had fired the shot, and now the hands on the wall clock indicated that it was three minutes after four. He had lived thirty-three years and been dead three minutes.

For a moment he was dazed, as one might be in waking suddenly from sleep or in recovering from a violent shock. As he slowly struggled into consciousness, it came to him that perhaps he had been sick; perhaps he had fainted.

He heard the ticking of a clock and saw his desk and the familiar walls of his office take form before him. Then he saw his body lying on the floor, with a freshly fired gun in its hand, and he knew that he was dead.

Lummick had not counted on this. He had wanted to die and stay dead, and here he was as alive as ever, with more life before him, perhaps, than behind.

One of his first thoughts was that he had acted the fool quite supremely. The events leading up to his act now seemed very trivial, especially since he had failed to accomplish his purpose. Above everything else he had wanted death, and he had merely placed himself in a condition where he couldn't die.

THE clock ticked on, unduly loud, and he watched the second hand while it slowly marked another minute. Of course this was another piece of folly. He had passed the boundary of time, where the ticking of clocks mean nothing and seconds and centuries register alike.

One does not count the sands on the seashore. And the horror of it was that, with all the ages and eons before him, he stood there, stark and alone, with nothing to do and nowhere to go.

It was altogether different from what he would have thought, granting that he would ever have admitted the possibility of one's living after a steel bullet had nicely perforated one's head.

One should either be spirited away to receive sentence, or wake up in the proper place—which, in his case, he admitted, would be an improper place. For a man with imagination and an adventurous spirit, even Hell would possess a certain lurid charm. It would surely be preferable to this.

In the first moments of consciousness he found himself hoping that it was a dream from which he would presently awake. A dream may hold all the torture and despair of reality—in fact, more; the difference is that one wakes from dreams. And Lummick soon knew that he would not wake.

A dream it might be—all life might be a dream—but he held no hope that he would rise from his bed in the morning to recall this strange experience. Too well he remembered planning this thing and the desperate execution of his hasty plans. And before him was another ghastly proof of reality.

The sight of his body sprawling on the floor filled him with pity and longing. It was so helpless, so terribly beyond good and evil, so uncouth with its bloody, matted hair, open mouth, and staring, unseeing eyes.

And this was the body he had cared for, pampered, dressed, fed and kept from heat and cold. Soon it would be growing cold; afterward, it would change into something that no eyes would care to behold. He hoped that they would find it . . .

AS IF in answer to this wish there was a knocking at the door. A pistol shot in a downtown office is not likely to pass unnoticed. Some one outside had heard the shot, and men outside were knocking, calling and demanding entrance.

He had no desire to be caught there. Then he recalled something he should have done; certain instructions he should have left for his wife. It was important, too, now that it was too late to correct.

He crossed over to his old-fashioned roll-top desk with the intention of amending a note he had written, but he could not budge the top. Likewise, a drawer at which he tugged frantically was not shaken. In desperation he grasped at a sheet of paper lying on the extended leaf.

"Oh, God!" he groaned.

Perhaps there is nothing—pain, fear, sorrow, or any other curse of man—quite so terrible as impotence. Power is the measure of life and its loss is despair.

And Lummick learned of his utter weakness when the paper at which he grasped defied his strength; he might as well have attempted to lift a mountain. All his strength counted for less than a breath of air.

Then he saw that he was not alone. An intruder had forced himself on what Lummick had intended for a purely personal and private matter. He was standing motionless by the door when Lummick first saw him, and something in his appearance

woke in Lummick a half memory.

Lummick was vaguely perturbed. The man couldn't very well be the coroner or a reporter: Lummick had locked the door before perfecting his deed, and the key was in the pocket of the crumpled form on the floor. And the men outside were still at the door, knocking, calling.

Somewhere, thought Lummick, he had seen that face before. Not somewhere, but everywhere, always. He could not recall the name, nor any place nor occasion, but the features were familiar, and Lummick had the impression that he had seen them all his life.

They were strikingly like Lummick's; only, of course, they couldn't be Lummick's own. There was nothing especially noticeable about them except the eyes, which were large and deep and seemed to see everything one was thinking.

"I seem to have trouble opening my desk," Lummick faltered.

The intruder looked accusingly first at the dead body and then at Lummick. But he said nothing.

Lummick was still worse disturbed. He felt called on for an excuse. A plea of self-defense, of course, was out of the question, and he couldn't claim that he didn't do it. The evidence was too strong against him: the gun was still in his body's hands.

He might have put in a plea that it was accidental, if it had not been for the note he had left in his desk. So he said, with a ghostly smile:

"Looks pretty bad to you, I guess!"

That would start conversation and give him time to think up a plausible excuse. He was still an opportunist.

"Why did you do it?" the intruder asked.

He was playing into Lummick's hands. He had let down the bars for Lummick's story.

"I did it for my unborn son," Lummick said.

"Is it a custom to make such a sacrifice for coming offspring?" asked the other.

Lummick looked at him, trying to decide if he was omniscient.

"All my life, above all other desires, I have wanted a son," he equivocated. "My wife was beautiful and gracious. I think I loved her—I have never given that much thought. But I know, and have known since my honeymoon, that I would not have married if it had not been for the thought of a son and heir to bear my name.

"I worked and planned for him, even before I thought seriously of marriage; I couldn't bear the thought that he might bear the hardships and poverty through which I have passed.

"You can fancy my exultation on learning that he was coming. I built an addition to my home and made an investment for his future. The dream of my life was about to be fulfilled, and I reveled in the thought of the comforts, luxuries and opportunities that I would throw at his feet. He is to arrive in two months. And today—the investment failed."

HE SPOKE dramatically. He had always been an actor off stage, and even now he could not draw the fine line of demarcation between his real emotions and his desire to impress others.

"But," protested the stranger, "you earned the money that you put into this investment, and what has been done can't be done again. Don't you think it would have been better for you to have lived and earned other money for him?"

"I couldn't have," whined Lummick. "The money wasn't mine. And I couldn't live after the disgrace I brought on him."

"Whose money was it?"

Lummick faltered.

"I was a guardian," he admitted. "My dead brother's child. It looked safe, and I would have paid it back with interest."

The stranger looked at him pityingly.

"So," he said, more in pity that in anger, "you rob an orphan that your son may have luxury and ease. And now your son, too, is an orphan, and in the place of luxury and ease he will have poverty and drudgery, and he will go through life with the handicap of a father who was not only a thief but a murderer.

Lummick withered under the picture.

"I'm not trying to make excuses," he declared feebly. "I only am to blame and I throw myself on your mercies. If I haven't already paid for my criminal folly——"

He broke off suddenly. The men outside, failing to get a response, ceased knocking and calling and broke in through a smashed door.

Under other conditions Lummick's love for the exciting and the dramatic might have been amply satisfied. Talking, gesturing, conjecturing, the crowd pressed around the body, while two officers tried to keep them back. They seemed unaware, however, of the presence of Lummick and his first caller.

Then the ubiquitous reporters, notebooks in hand. Name? Motive? Any relatives? Had his wife been notified? One of his friends was now on the way to her with the news.

"Made a nice job of it, Snoopy," said one, bending over the body.

"Made a mess of it," said Snoopy.

The stranger gave them no attention.

"YOU haven't paid," he stated, answering Lummick's broken sentence. He spoke as loudly as any other man in the room, but Lummick observed that he alone heard.

"But you will pay—to the uttermost farthing. Not in the crude way which you were taught in childhood. You will not be incarcerated nor branded with hot irons. You will not even be doomed to conscious remorse. But you shall have justice as superior to all this as God is to man."

Lummick, aware in some way that judgment was being pronounced on him, listened with painful intensity. The exciting comments of the little mob interested him no longer.

"This justice," pursued the other, "is the only real justice in the world. Compared to it, the most delicate hairspring balance is coarse and inaccurate. In the life which you have left men were jailed for theft and put to the same kind of hard labor for scores of various offenses. Here the reward or punishment is fitted to the deed. It is as inexorable as the law of gravity, and as true."

"It is different from what I thought," ventured Lummick.

"It may be different, but it couldn't be otherwise. All the universe is ruled by one immutable and perfect law. The apple drops downward, never upward, and the worlds in the farthest systems describe the same courses. And not only your deeds, but the minutest thoughts you have had since childhood, react in such a way as to make your justice perfect."

At this juncture Lummick was witness to a less important verdict. The pompous little dignitary elected to sit in judgment over the dead entered and took charge of the situation. A jury was solemnly empaneled and the facts in the case were elicited and weighed.

This formality occupied several minutes and brought out nothing that was not already known. In brief, the deceased had been alone at the time

of the act, and several witnesses testified that they had broken down the door and so found him. Then, there was the letter.

"Suicide," was the verdict. "And I leave the penalty to God."

Thence to the undertaker, with Lummick and the other trailing, like mourners, behind. Lummick stood aside while they placed the body on the board.

"AND that's that," said his companion, dismissing Lummick's mortal existence as a thing of the past. "Are you ready?"

"I am ready," said Lummick, shivering.

He felt sorrow in leaving the body, at which he felt he was looking for the last time, but this was one of the common penalties of mortality.

Though he dared not ask, his chief concern was in where they were going. So they walked again into the street. And again he saw that however dense the crowds through which they passed, he and his companion were not seen. But now he understood. They were the things he had most dreaded in childhood and ridiculed in his maturer years. They were ghosts.

At times he could hardly keep from laughing, it was all so incongruous, so impossible! Two lone ghosts in broad daylight on the crowded streets of a busy city, and not one of the thousands among whom they walked knew that they were there!

His guide was not talking now; they were hurrying on to Lummick's destiny. And all the time Lummick was saying, as if trying to impress the thought on his consciousness:

"And here I am, dead!"

But even then he was oppressed by the recurrence of trivial, irrelevant things. The refrain of a silly song persisted in thrumming through his consciousness; an obscene joke which he had heard the day before passed through his mind.

"And there," he said, pointing out an office, "is where I bluffed out the pot one night on a pair of sevens."

He paused, horror-stricken at his levity. Was he insane, as well as dead—to think of such things at an hour like this?

They went down a street familiar to Lummick and sometimes they met his friends. By this time the news of his death was scattering on the streets and he caught snatches of inaccurate stories relating to his life and the cause of his suicide.

Sometimes these men looked at him straight and hard and he felt quite sure that they saw him, but he had to step aside to keep out of their way. He was, he reflected, no more than a wandering thought.

He could see and hear them so distinctly; it seemed impossible that he could not make himself seen and heard. And they were so unreasonable, so careless of facts!

It would seem that when one had placed one's self beyond the pale of replying and correcting errors, men should be more careful to speak the truth. Once, at a glaring misstatement from a man who should have known better, he stopped and shouted a correction in the man's face.

"Come," said his companion. "You can't make him hear. This is the gulf which no man may cross."

WHAT, thought Lummick, was the perfect justice of which the stranger had spoken and to which he was being led? They were now going in the direction of Lummick's home.

Could it be that he was to be confronted with the ruin and desolation that he had brought on his fragile, young wife? Or was he to be shown the place where his son was to be born, an orphan, in poverty and disgrace?

And always the thought of eternity loomed before him.

"If I only had another chance!" he whined.

"You will have another chance," answered his guide. "You shall enter the world again, with the same problems to solve, the same difficulties to overcome.

"There will be no memory of the life through which you have passed, or only such a subconscious memory as may creep into your dreams and certain moods of your waking thoughts. Sometimes, particularly in childhood, you will seem to recall things which your elders will say that you have only dreamed."

"I had such half-memories in my childhood," Lummick volunteered.

"And you will have them again. And you will never be able to explain your repulsion for firearms, nor why you will be inordinately cautious with your own and others' money.

"You will never know why you struggle against a vain, selfish love for yourself and your own, and into a love for others and a consideration of their rights. In this way you will pay for your foibles, profit by your mistakes, and struggle step by step nearer to perfection."

"For God's sake," said Lummick, "I can't stand this much longer. What are you going to do with me?"

"I can do nothing. You alone must work out your destiny. There is no one else who can help or harm."

THEY were directly in front of Lummick's home. The stranger paused.

"And you give as the reason for your theft," he asked, "that you wanted your son to avoid the hardships that have been your lot? And the reason for your suicide that you could not bear to see the disgrace you have brought on him?"

Lummick, bewildered, nodded in affirmation. And he noted that the other man's features were so similar to his own that he wondered if he had been talking to himself.

Perhaps he had been talking to himself. For in that moment he knew that to each man there are only two realities in the universe: himself and God.

THEN the stranger laughed. He laughed so loud and long that Lummick thought surely everybody on the street would hear him.

But though his cachinnations rang out above the jangle of trolley cars and the mingled din of motors and voices, no one turned a head toward him, and the stream of life went on untouched and sane.

"Oh, what a joke!" he cried. "Oh, what joke! It was you who doomed your son to go through life in poverty and disgrace. It was my mission to find a little body in which you should begin life again. Your wife heard of your act, and in her condition, you can guess the result."

Lummick was silent while the other paused to laugh over the strange, colossal jest.

"And people will say that he resembles you. Oh, if they could only know!"

"What do you mean?" cried Lummick.

"Come," said the other.

Then they entered the house together. It was growing dark. And presently the cry of a new-born babe floated out on the air.

Ligeia

By RICHARD KEITH

TOM BURGENER urged his horse along the narrow canyon hemmed in by black, towering walls on which the pale moon glinted with a dead, sombre lustre. Its dim phosphorescence conveyed no suggestion of warmth to the deputy sheriff as he toiled up the steep incline leading to the mining camp above him. Rather, it seemed to harmonize with the cold bleak earth over which it shone like a distorted marble wraith.

No sound penetrated the silence except the clatter of the horse's hoofs on the frozen ground. No breath of wind stirred in the pine trees standing like sentinels in the white patches of snow at the edge of the creek.

It was a night on which the world about Tom Burgener seemed a stark, frigid planet suspended in a glacial void terrifying in its immensity.

The deputy sheriff briskly rubbed his ears and leaning back in his saddle slapped his arms crosswise against his shoulders. His feet, encased in heavy boots covered by thick woolen socks, had lost all sense of feeling. His fingers were numb.

But he pushed on stubbornly with a determination which even the invisible enemy that was slowly congealing his blood could not vanquish—a purpose which showed itself in the grim set of his jaw as he looked down over a saucer-shaped valley set between two ridges that gaped back from it like yawning jaws. At the bottom of the dip the faint rays of the moon played on a tiny cabin from which a dim light gleamed.

With drawling, impersonal oaths at his stiffened joints, Tom Burgener eased his lanky form off his horse and guided the animal down the steep slope toward the cabin below. He trudged slowly over the rickety log bridge across the creek, tied his horse to a stunted pine and, throwing a blanket around the animal, he knocked at the cabin door.

The noise of a chair scraping against wood was followed by the

squeak of a rusty hinge as the door swung back. A man stood in the doorway, his long white hair shining against the flickering background of a kerosene lamp which rested on the table behind him.

The deputy sheriff's right hand crept toward his hip, but he jerked it away suddenly, as if swayed from a previously planned campaign of action by some new impulse which had just taken root in his brain.

"Oh, it's you, is it, Tom?" said the man in the doorway, as the light fell on the deputy's face. " 'Peers like you might come on in an' warm yore hide. Cold night, this."

"Yuh," grunted Tom Burgener, entering the cabin, "colder'n a brick barn, Jed. Wanta talk t'yuh, Jed Barton. Wanta talk t'yuh 'bout Jim Kinney agin."

THE MAN addressed as Jed Barton closed the cabin door and walked slowly toward the stove in the corner of the room. The flames hissed as he raised the lid and spat meditatively into the fire.

Then with shuffling steps he dragged forward a chair and placed it in front of the open oven door, motioning the deputy to be seated. He pulled another chair from beside a door leading to a woodshed and, placing it beside the table, the old prospector sat down.

The dim yellow glare of the lamp streamed over his white hair and lighted up his pale, wrinkled face. As he stared down at the floor only his eyes might give any indication of his character. Their black glittering sparkle was almost uncanny. They shone like the eyes of a lynx crouching in a thicket.

Jed Barton bit a chew from his plug of tobacco and waited for the deputy sheriff to speak. For a minute the silence in the cabin was as penetrating as the frigid night outside. Only the click of the prospector's jaws and the sputter of the lamp wick disturbed the stillness.

Then the deputy sheriff spoke.

"Like tuh find out some more 'bout yore sidekick Jim Kinney, Jed," he drawled. "His sister's gittin' worried cause he hain't showed up sinct that strike you an' him made. She thought I'd better come on up an' talk t'yuh. 'Tain't like Jim Kinney to go way an' leave no word nor nuthin'. Can't seem tuh find hide nor hair o' him sinct I talked t'yuh."

Jed Barton's skinny fingers drummed on the pine table beside him.

"Pore Jim," he muttered. "Me an' him grubstaked together in these hills nigh onto fifteen years this comin' April, Tom."

"Hain't saw him sinct he come back with the assayer's report on that ore?"

"Nope. Not sinct he come back, Tom."

"Hain't had no word from him?"

"Nary word, Tom."

"Huh. Derned queer."

"Yuh. Tain't like Jim to go 'way an' lemme alone here. Alone ceptin' fur Legeia, o' course."

"Who'n hell's Ligeia, Jed?"

"Keerful, Tom."

Jed Barton's black eyes narrowed beneath his white brow.

"I've knowed you sinct you was a little shaver carryin' yore daddy's dinner bucket to the Tomboy mine, but yuh can't use cuss words in the same mouth with Ligeia. Jim Kinney done that."

The deputy sheriff glanced sharply at the staring eyes of the old prospector and then he shifted his gaze to the toe of his boot which rested on the oven door. His hand again crept toward his hip, but he cautiously altered its direction toward the side pocket of his corduroy coat.

Pulling a pipe from his pocket he filled and lighted it and puffed blue

smoke rings into the air. His voice betrayed the tension creeping over him as he turned toward Jed Barton.

"Nice gal, this Ligeia, Jed?" he asked softly.

"Purty, Tom," came the reply.

"Livin' here with yuh?"

"Uh-huh. Leastwise she comes an' goes."

"Um. Could yuh—would yuh—like t'tell me 'bout her, Jed?"

The wrinkled prospector did not seem to hear the question. He appeared to be studying the cooking utensils hanging on the wall behind the stove.

He rested his elbow on the table, cupping his chin in his hand, and then fastened his eyes on a tongue of flame which was shooting from a crack between the stove lid and the iron surface. The pine logs crackled as a slight breeze stirred outside the cabin.

"Like t'tell me 'bout Ligeia, Jed?" repeated Tom Burgener.

Jed Barton's thin body moved slightly, but he kept his eyes glued to the flickering fire.

"Yuh," he drawled quietly. "Guess they hain't no reason why I can't tell yuh 'bout Ligeia, Tom. If yuh won't cuss."

"I won't cuss, Jed."

The prospector ignored the reply. As he stared at the fire his black eyes had in them the haunted gaze of a man who has looked upon weird spectres dancing in the moonlight.

He shifted one bony leg across the other.

"LIGEIA fust come to me," he said in a low voice, "arter me an' Jim Kinney'd been shet up in this here cabin fur a long time on account o' them heavy snows. The snow piled up so's we couldn't hardly see the crick outside.

"We'd laid in lots o' grub an' wood, so they wasn't nuthin' ter do 'cept set an' wait fur a chinook to melt the snow. Got kind o' lonesome jest settin' here all day an' waitin' fur a thaw. When a little one 'ud come we'd have another snow that night an' then we'd set back agin.

"Jim 'ud play solytaire all day an' most o' the night, but I never keered fur cards. I like tuh read. Pomes, mostly. Like pomes, Tom?"

"Never read none, Jed."

"I allus did like pomes," mused Jed Barton, spitting into a wood box beside the stove. "'Specially in these here hills. Pomes hain't real, o' course, but sometimes these hills hain't, neither.

"Arter me an' Jim Kinney'd been penned in here fur 'bout a week I dug me out an' ol' book o' pomes I picked up onct when I was in Denver. I got ter readin' that book an' I found a pome in it 'bout a woman named Ligeia.

"Ligeia. . . . Purty name. It took my ear.

"Funny pome. Had a swing t'it like a orchestry playin' music. Up an' down it went while I was readin' it an' purty soon the wind outside the cabin seemed ter be sayin' it over an' over. . . . . Ligeia—

"Queer fellers, them that write pomes, Tom."

"Nuts," scoffed the deputy. "Nuts that——"

"Nope, not nuts, Tom," broke in Jed Barton quickly, his black eyes flashing.

"Leastwise, the feller that wrote Ligeia wa'n't no nut. Only people that can't see Ligeia is nuts—like Jim Kinney."

The deputy shot another glance at the old prospector. Jed Barton's eyes were glittering wildly behind his thick lashes now. His lips were parted in a smile as he stared at the flames licking the iron surface of the stove.

"Jim Kinney was a nut," he went on slowly. "Only I didn't like t'tell

him so 'cause we'd been sidekicks fur a long time.

"Arter I'd read that pome 'bout Ligeia I didn't mind bein' shut in here so much. Me an' Jim 'ud set here all day long, Jim playin' solytaire an' me thinkin' bout Ligeia.

"At night the coyotes 'ud howl an' the timber wolves 'ud yelp. Got purty lonesome fur Jim. Sometimes he'd look up from his cards an' say: 'My Gawd, I'll go crazy ef we don't git out soon.'

"I wouldn't say nuthin' 'cause Ligeia 'ud keep runnin' through my head. I could see her purty yaller hair fallin' down over her shoulders an' her blue eyes laughin' at me."

"Huh!" grunted the deputy.

Jed Barton did not seem to hear.

"Like one o' them women what live in the water," he said, " an' set on the rocks tuh let their hair dry.

"I wa'n't lonesome no more now. It didn't seem like we'd ever get out o' these ol' hills agin, but I didn't care. Snow ever-place. An' cold. An' the coyotes yappin'. An' Jim playin' solytaire by the hour an' me jest settin' an' thinkin' 'bout Ligeia. Got so's I couldn't sleep at night 'cause she kept runnin' through my head."

The deputy sheriff stuffed a pine log into the stove and leaned back in his chair and refilled his pipe. Jed Barton hunched his thin shoulders up and fastened his eyes on a thin trail of smoke drifting from the stove.

"One night," he said, "I couldn't go ter sleep a-tall. My head felt funny. I got scairt layin' there lookin' up at the logs an' hearin' Jim snorin' away in his bunk. When a coyote 'ud yawl I'd shake all over an' when he'd stop the wind 'ud moan.

"Pretty soon I knew the wind was sayin' Ligeia's name. Over an' over. I could see her floatin' 'round in the air. She seemed tuh be tryin' ter get ter me, but suthin' was holdin' her back. She 'peered ter be callin' me.

"I set up in my bunk an' looked at the door o' the cabin. It was openin', little by little. Then all of a sudden it swung 'way back an' in walked Ligeia!"

The prospector's voice had in it a note of exultation now. The deputy sheriff glanced out of the corner of his eye at the white distorted face and the fingers that twisted nervously as Jed Barton clasped and unclasped them. Barton's voice had risen higher and higher until the deputy had felt a cold chill racing up and down his spine.

"IN SHE come!" shouted Jed Barton, "not mindin' the snow an' the cold 'cause she was comin' ter see me! Her yaller hair was hangin' down her back an' fallin' all over her white dress that trailed to the floor, with only a cord around the waist o' it to keep it from floatin' 'way.

"In she come, closin' the door soft so's not to wake Jim Kinney an' creepin' along inch by inch till she come to the side o' my bunk. She smiled down at me an' took hold o' my hand with her'n like she'd been puttin' off comin' ter see me fur a long time an' was makin' up fur it by bein' glad she was here at last.

"I got up an' made a fire an' arter it got blazin' me an' Ligeia set there an' talked. Funny! Her voice was like the pome. Soft an' a swing ter it. She tol' me fust she lived in one place an' then in another. In the ocean an' hills an' even in music an' flowers an' lakes. Ever'where, Ligeia was.

"All night long she talked ter me an' just when the dawn begun to filter through the winder there she left me alone settin' by the stove."

Jed Barton's arm moved out in a straight line from his shoulder as if to embrace a spectre form which had suddenly appeared beside him. His voice sank to a low, tender pitch.

"When Jim Kinney woke up," he said, "he looked at me kind o' funny. I was laffin' 'cause I was feelin' good.

" 'Lot yuh got ter be laffin' at,' says Jim. 'An' us shet up in this God-forsaken hole.'

"I kep' still 'cause I didn't want Jim ter know about Ligeia comin' ter see me. He might o' got jealous.

"Ever' night arter that Ligeia'd come an' we'd set by the fire an talk till the mornin' come an' she had ter go 'way. Talk 'bout how she could ride on the wind an' stand on a blade o' grass. Funny!

" 'Bout that time I seen Jim Kenny was actin' queer. I'd ketch him lookin' at me when he thought I didn't see him. Onct in a while I couldn't help smilin' ter myself an' he'd see me.

"THE SNOW broke up at last. A chinook blew steady over these hills fur two days an' on the night o' the second me an' Jim knew that the next day would see us out prospectin' agin. Jim was so glad he sung, but I wasn't feelin' so good 'bout goin' 'way an' leavin' Ligeia.

"I didn't git ter bed a-tall that night. I set up waitin' fur Ligeia. When she come I told her that me an' Jim 'ud be goin' out inter the hills prospectin' the next day.

"She seemed kind o' sorry, too. She pushed her yaller hair out o' her eyes an' played with the cord 'round her waist for a while. Then she leaned over an' whispered in my ear:

" 'Foller the crick till yuh come to three pines,' she says ter me, 'across from a rock that looks like a camel's back. There you'll find it. Gold. Heaps o' it. Piles o' it that'll run through yer fingers like my yaller hair does.'

"An' with that she left me 'cause the dawn was filterin' through the winder there."

Jed Barton's voice had fallen to a whisper. Only his eyes showed the emotion which was tearing his soul. They sparkled like those of a man burning with fever. As he let his voice drop he leaned over an' placed his hand on Tom Burgener's shoulder. The deputy sheriff jumped as if a red-hot brand had seared his skin.

"I done like Ligeia tol' me," continued Jed Barton, removing his hand from the deputy's shoulder.

"The next mornin' me an' Jim Kinney started out. I tol' Jim ter foller me down the crick an' he done it. The sun was meltin' the little snow that was left an' the crick was purty full, but I follered along it till I come ter three pine trees settin' right across from a rock that looked like the hump o' a camel's back.

"I never hollered ter Jim a-tall. I got off my horse an' unstrapped my pick. I knowed Ligeia would put my pick jest where she wanted it so I jest shet my eyes an' swung. Purty soon I found it, jest as Jim come up.

"There it was—Gold! Gold! Everwhere! Lots o' it an' all high grade an' a vein runnin' back inter the hills only Gawd knows how fur!

"Me an' Jim was so excited we couldn't do nuthin' but jump up an' down an' holler. Then we put some o' the ore inter our sacks an' come on back tuh the cabin. We'd been lookin' fur gold nigh onto fifteen years this comin' April an' at last we'd found it.

"The tears was fallin' down Jim's face as he left tuh take some samples to the assay office. Guess that's when he tol' his sister an' some o' the boys 'bout our strike."

"Jim come back home that night, Jed?" broke in the deputy suddenly.

"Yuh," came the reply. "Jim come on back here that night loaded ter the gills. I was settin' here by the stove waitin' fur Ligeia tuh come so's I could tell her 'bout our strike. Jest then Jim rolled in, feelin' purty gay. He slapped me on the back.

" 'We're rich, Jed!' he says. 'It

assays big. We're rich men, Jed. You an' me.'

"'An' Ligeia, Jim,' I says.

"'Who'n tarnation's Ligeia?' asks Jim.

"'Keerful, Jim,' I tells him. 'Ligeia tol' me where tuh look fur that gold an' she comes in with us fur a third.'

"Jim got mad an' said suthin' I couldn't catch. He kep' on tellin' me we were rich, allus leavin' out Ligeia. Ever'time I had ter tell him Ligeia owned a third o' whatever we got.

"All of a sudden Jim got so mad he shook all over. He was so drunk he wa'n't hisself no more. He come right over close tuh me as I was settin' here by the stove.

"'Yore crazy as a loon!' he yells. 'Yuh an' yore talk 'bout some slut named Ligeia. You an' yore Ligeia must be mad——'

"NO MAN could talk ter me like that 'bout Ligeia long ez I had a leg to stand on. I picked up suthin' an' started fur Jim Kinney. I grabbed him, but he wuz stronger'n me even if he was drunk. He took me by the throat an' started tuh choke me.

"He had me on the floor gaspin' when the door swung back an' Ligeia come in. Soon's she saw Jim killin' me she come over an' tried tuh pull him off.

"But Jim couldn't seem ter feel her hand on his shoulder or her yaller hair that was streamin' down over his face as Ligeia tried to pull him off'n me. I kep' gettin' weaker an' weaker. I had jest enuf stren'th left to whisper to Ligeia.

"'Choke him, Ligeia!' I says. 'Choke him with that cord around yer waist!'

"Legeia's face got white, but she undone the cord around her waist an' makin' a loop o' it she fastened it round Jim's neck an' begun to pull. She pulled an' pulled till Jim's tongue was hangin' out an' his eyes poppin' from his head. She pulled till . . ."

Jed Barton's voice rose in a shriek as he painted the picture of the killing of Jim Kinney. His white face became livid and he leaped toward the window and gazed out into the frosty night.

Like a flash Tom Burgener jumped to his feet. He ran toward the old prospector and snapped a pair of handcuffs on his wrists.

Jed Barton gazed down at the steel cuffs and then his black eyes fastened themselves docilely on the deputy's face.

"What fur yuh doin' like a-that, Tom?" he asked in a puzzled voice.

"Never mind, Jed," replied the deputy. "What yuh do with Jim Kinney?"

"Me?" asked Jed in a preplexed tone. "I never done nuthin' with Jim."

"What Ligeia do with Jim, Jed?"

An understanding light broke over the old man's face. He nodded toward the woodshed door.

"'Peers ter me like," he said slowly, "'peers ter me like Ligeia put Jim in that woodshed."

TOM BURGENER picked up the lamp from the table and opened the woodshed door. He peered down at the floor. On the uneven pine boards, a ragged piece of hemp wound about his neck so tightly that the rope cut deeply into his flesh, lay the dead body of Jim Kinney, his eyes bulging and his tongue protruding. Beside him lay a sack of ore and an old book.

The deputy sheriff picked up the book and walking back to the table set down the lamp. The book fell open at a dirty, thumbed page.

"Huh," muttered Tom Burgener, spelling out the print at the top of the page. "Al Aaraaf—by Edgar—Allen—Poe.

"Gawd! They orter be a law agin pomes that drive men crazy."

Dolly Blaw

By WILLIAM MERRIAM ROUSE

A crack of a whip, a flash of sunlight, an unexpected softness—that's Dolly Blaw. And William Merriam Rouse has injected into this tale of romance and adventure a dash and verve which blend singularly well with the accompanying strains of loyalty and the undertones of lust and cruelty.

CHAPTER I

SOFT CONTRALTO AND BLUE EYES

DOLLY BLAW, Severe Blaw's only child, backed her team into the barn with kind words and a wrist of steel. But when she tore her overalls vaulting over the wagon wheel she did not say kind words to fate.

For fully half a minute she stood still and made remarks about the nature of her luck in a soft contralto voice. She began well, and her peroration was worthy of a lumberjack.

After Dolly had expressed herself she turned her attention to the bags of ground feed with which the box wagon was loaded. With finely shaped, roughened, expert hands she took hold of the bags and jerked them over the sideboards.

A heave, with shoulder, knee and back all in it, and each bag landed accurately beside the grain bin. She let those bags of feed know who was boss around that neck of the woods.

When the last bag was ranked up Dolly powdered her nose from a brass vanity case that she had got for half a dollar in the general store at the Corners—goods left over from Christmas went cheap unless

they lasted over to the next Christmas.

It was a fine, straight nose that she powdered; a better nose than any other girl on the lake road could see when she looked into a mirror. Dolly fixed the nose to suit, and tucked up black curls which had fallen from under a bandanna handkerchief that she wore knotted over one ear. Mill dust is bad for the hair.

"There, by jinks!" exclaimed Dolly, straightening slender shoulders and regarding the rank of feed bags with extreme satisfaction. "My team'll eat for a while, even if nobody else does around here!"

ALL THIS had been seen and heard by a pair of admiring eyes located on one of the beams over the hay loft. The eyes belonged to Jason Mobrey, generally and affectionately known as "Nip"; and if it had not been for the shadows up there among the old-fashioned timbers those eyes would have been seen to deepen and soften to the blue of Lake Champlain on a perfect summer day. Nip was in love.

He held his place on the beam with the unconscious ease of a cat; it was no trouble at all for Nip Mobrey to handle his five feet ten of tapering bone and muscle. Whether his body swung with the rhythm of a rising and falling axe or followed the gyrations of an unruly horse, it moved with the same precision and the same force. If Nip had had a different disposition he might have been the bully of the lake road.

It was a short drop to the new hay, fragrant with clover. Mobrey took advantage of the rebound and with the second spring landed on the barn floor a few feet from the newly powdered nose of Dolly Blaw.

She was not a nervous girl, but she jumped; and a vivacious pink made itself seen through tan and the powder from the Corners general store.

"I suppose you think you're smart," she said in the gentle contralto that tugged at the heartstrings of Nip, "and I suppose you think you've heard something!"

"You've got the prettiest black eyes I ever saw!" exclaimed Mobrey. "And, gosh, you certainly can swear noble!"

"Well," replied Dolly, "what do you want, anyway? I was brought up by Severe Blaw, and he can't ask you to pass the potatoes without swearing about it. I'd be awful dumb if I hadn't learned how, wouldn't I?"

"And the way you can handle a feed bag, Dolly, is enough to make any able-bodied man want to kiss you!"

"Bags of feed?" repeated Dolly vaguely.

She slapped at a fly on the neck of the off horse.

"I calculate to feed this team. The deeper in Pop gets with that Twofoot Adams gang the worse things go around here. Pretty soon we won't have anything to eat but hard cider and shelled corn!"

"I said it made a man want to kiss you!"

Nip moved a little nearer and hesitated. Love is peculiar that way; if Nip had not been so much in love with Dolly he would not have hesitated at all.

"I heard the first time!"

She began to fool with a harness buckle that was perfectly all right.

"If a man wants to, then why in the name of scrambling catamounts don't he do it?"

Mobrey had thought it would be a wonderful thing to kiss Dolly Blaw, but he had never had any idea that that slender, muscular form, concealed by khaki trousers and a gray

flannel shirt, was so deliciously feminine.

No reliable man had ever been heard to say, seriously, that he had kissed Dolly Blaw. One admitted that he had been hit over the head with a shovel handle trying it, and it was common knowledge that she had knocked the darkly handsome Twofoot Adams down a flight of stairs at a dance in the Valeboro town hall.

NIP MOBREY lost count of time. He trembled with happiness; his vision was blurred by it. It seemed to him that he had reached his heart's desire.

It had taken nearly a year to win Dolly's confidence, friendship; to overcome her defiance and suspicion. It was easier to make friends with a mean man's dog than to get on the right side of Dolly Blaw.

"My ribs!" she gasped, after a long time. "My neck is busted, Nip! Not but what I like it!"

Mobrey promptly held her off at arm's length and gave his eyes a treat. He grinned and felt very foolish.

"Let's go over to Valeboro this afternoon and get a license!" he said huskily.

"A *what?*"

"Marriage license! To get married with!"

"Nip, do you mean you want to marry me? With a preacher, and ring, and everything?"

"Sure!" he cried. "You—what ——"

"Old Severe Blaw's daughter? Likely to have to take chewing tobacco to your father-in-law in jail 'most any time?"

"Dolly," said Nip, "I'd want to marry you if you had a wooden leg!"

"I don't believe it, but I like to hear it," she told him. "Anyway, you've got faith in me and that's the main thing. If you didn't have you wouldn't have got this far. Because if you didn't have faith in me I wouldn't trust you as far as I can throw a bull by the tail!"

"Of course!" said Mobrey. "Why not?"

"Well, Severe Blaw is quite a mouthful for any man to swallow!"

"I don't have to marry him, do I?"

"I'm going to divorce him as a father when I marry you!"

"Don't be too all-fired hard-hearted, Dolly! Your old man might be worse——"

"Not unless he was Twofoot Adams himself, he couldn't! Listen, Nip! That gang's started to bring in Chinks, one at a time, hid in a sloop. That old sloop of Pop's, the *Polly Jones.*

"They got some place on board where they can hide one so the devil himself couldn't find him. Take one on with some foolish cargo for a bluff in Canada and land him down at the south end of the lake.

"And dope—I guess they're running that, too. Nip, if it was bootlegging I wouldn't turn the old man down, but this business makes me sick!"

"You don't have to get mixed up," said Mobrey, sobered and astonished by the extent of her revelation. "And Severe ought to be making enough to take care of himself for life! You ought to be having turkey and ice cream every meal!"

"Twofoot takes it away from him faster than he can make it!" shrugged the girl. "Stud poker, mostly. That Twofoot! He'd ought to be hamstrung!"

"He'll get it sooner or later, anyway," growled Mobrey. "And sooner if he bothers you! I been wishing I had some good authority for poking him if he so much as looked crossways at you! Now I'll have it!"

CHAPTER II

DOLLY PLAYS SQUARE

"YES, Nip!"

Dolly Blaw actually blushed and let her gaze fall to the dusty, splintered boards of the barn floor. She followed a crack with the toe of one small, rugged shoe.

"Nip, they's something I got to do before we get married!"

"Do?" he repeated absent-mindedly. He was holding a work-hardened little paw and patting it. "Do anything you want to, just so we get married this afternoon!"

"I—I don't want to, but I'll have to put it off till tomorrow. It's something I got to fix up, Nip."

"What is it?" demanded Mobrey, all at once filled by a premonition of trouble. "I'll fix it for you."

"You can't. I'll tell you, so you'll know. There was a man I said maybe I'd marry—— Now don't get all haired up! I didn't say for sure and he didn't kiss me, neither! So don't begin to paw the earth! I got to go and tell him I'm going to marry you and take back a locket he let me have. That's all, Nip."

"You don't have to——"

"Yes! You'd say so yourself if it was the other way 'round. I've always played square."

"I s'pose it is square," agreed Nip dully.

It was impossible not to believe her, looking into her eyes.

"Who is it, Dolly?"

"It's Snub Kirby. You know him."

"Why, sure! Snub and I was buddies before he moved up to Poke o' Moonshine Mountain! But Snub——"

"What?" she asked when he did finish.

"Nothing!" muttered Mobrey. "It would be all right with him if you didn't go."

"It wouldn't be all right with me!"

For the first time since the appearance of Mobrey the face of Dolly grew hard—fixed in the look she had for strangers when she was driving team.

"I told him I'd let him know, and before I get married to you it's fair to go and tell him about it."

"You do what you want to," replied Nip slowly. "When do you figure on getting back here?"

"I just as soon travel all night!"

She snapped into action and began to unhook her team from the box wagon.

"Soon as the horses can eat I'll start. You come back here tomorrow about noon. I'll be ready as quick as I can clean up and change my clothes after I get home, and you know it don't take long to get married in these parts. There's nobody and nothing around this place to say good-by to, and I'll take my team with me."

"All right, Dolly."

Mobrey wanted to protest, but he could not think of suitable words to voice his objection. This trip of hers seemed to him unnecessary, the idea far-fetched.

Dolly probably did not know it, but Snub Kirby had been paying frantic attention to Corinne Gebo, the belle of Poke o' Moonshine. Maybe Snub had not taken Dolly as seriously as she had taken him. And, anyhow, a man might acquire a new girl, or even a wife, between sunrise and sunset.

"You'd better beat it," said Dolly. "Pop is due home, and if we can ease out of this joint without a row, so much the better. Not that I care if you smear somebody, but the gang might lay an axe over your head."

"I don't want to smear anybody," replied Mobrey. "Things might as well be pleasant."

"They never will be as long as

Twofoot Adams is out of jail and alive! So get that notion out of your head! Foolish!"

CHAPTER III

SHARP EDGES

SHE threw him a laughing glance and a half-ashamed kiss as she led the horses away to their stalls. Nip Mobrey walked slowly out of the barn and stood looking upon the sunken and dejected frame house which was the home of Severe Blaw; bricks gone from the chimney, a sag where the foundation had been allowed to tumble into the cellar, and the undisturbed litter of years in the yard.

None of this was the fault of Dolly. All her time was taken by housework and the task of earning enough with the team to keep herself and her father fed. The inside of that bare home was neat enough. as Mobrey knew, to do credit to any housewife on the lake road.

It had been the intention of Nip to wait and see Dolly off, in spite of her dismissal; but when he saw the shaggy head of Severe Blaw turn in from the main road he decided that it would be better to appear casual.

Nip sauntered away from the barn and went to meet the old reprobate whom he hoped to make his father-in-law within two days.

Severe looked what he was, and at times his appearance even did him an injustice. He refused to have a hair-cut more than once a year, and now, in October, iron gray curls draped his ears; they would be much longer by spring.

A nose as pointed as a hound dog's gave him an air of suspicion. His suspenders were fastened to his trousers by copper rivets and there was a fresh smudge of axle grease on his torn overalls. Mobrey wondered how Dolly's mother had ever been induced to marry him.

"Hello!" said Severe.

He stopped, took out his plug of tobacco and meditatively gnawed off a chew.

"What you doing here, Nip?"

"I was on my way home from the Corners and I dropped in a minute," said Nip, not at all pleased by the old man's tone.

"Well, if Twofot Adams sees you here you're liable to take a drop into the lake!" chuckled Severe, although without mirth. "Him, he's a bad man to run up against!"

"What's he got to do with it?" demanded Mobrey. "I thought this was your place."

"Mebbe him and me ain't so far apart in the way we look at things," replied Blaw.

"I didn't come to see you!" Nip was beginning to get angry. "I stopped to see Dolly, and I don't know as that's any of your business! Or Twofoot's, either!"

"They say you got a wallop, but I never heard tell of your using it on anybody!" Severe was being deliberately insulting. "You better get it limbered up if you're going to buck Twofoot Adams."

"Dolly won't have anything to do with him!" barked Mobrey, even though he was conscious that he was saying too much. "Nor me, either! But that don't mean that I'm afraid of him, and the Hickey boys, and all the rest of his gang!"

"I heard folks talk before!" sneered Blaw; and before Nip could reply he went on into the house with a vicious slam of the door.

Nip glanced over his shoulder toward the barn and saw the arm of Dolly waving him away. After all, it was better policy to avoid trouble before they were married; and so

Nip Mobrey went reluctantly toward the shack on the lake shore that he was pridefully converting into a neat little house as fast as he could save the money for materials.

CHAPTER IV

ON THE "POLLY JONES"

THE wolves of jealousy came prowling with the fall of darkness. Nip sat on his doorstep and watched the purple curtain of night draw slowly down over Lake Champlain; the stars pricked out, but they gave him no comfort. He saw only black waters and the shadows which stretched out from the woods like monstrous arms.

What was Dolly Blaw doing, miles away in that darkness? Now that he examined her story, alone with himself, it seemed ridiculous. There was no other girl on the lake road who would go to all that trouble to be square with a man. It did not sound reasonable.

What of Twofoot Adams? There had been a hint behind the sneering defiance of Severe Blaw.

With midnight Mobrey could stand the suspense no longer. He loved Dolly with a feeling which had been a revelation to him, and he told himself that if she had cared about him in the same way they would now be husband and wife. Thus the wolves gnawed at faith.

The hands of Nip Mobrey were shaking when at last he got up from the doorstep and went toward the shed where he kept what passed in the mountains for a car—a chassis with an engine that had once been junked had been persuaded to run for him.

Having started, Nip went purposefully about his undertaking. If he could find out what Dolly was doing this night his mind would be at rest, either in despair or happiness. He drove the throbbing engine and trifled with the chance of breaking his neck a dozen times along the first five miles of dirt road.

Twofoot Adams must be located first of all, and to that end Mobrey ran down to the cove where Blaw's sloop was habitually tied up at an ancient and decaying landing.

EXCEPT for the *Polly Jones* the cove was always deserted, and so when Mobrey saw the riding lights of a boat he knew that he had not come entirely in vain. He drove his skeleton car into the bushes and went cautiously out upon the uncertain planks of the landing. It was well known that Twofoot had spent most of his time that summer on the *Polly Jones.*

Nip stepped from the landing to the deck of the gently swaying sloop, after having made sure as well as he could in the starlight that there was no one about. Light came through the ports of the deckhouse and streamed faintly up the companionway.

There was also the murmur of voices below, intermittent and growling. Mobrey stooped and peered in at one of the portholes.

It was a poker game, with all of the gang but the leader there. Severe Blaw sat humped over the table, with a few scatterd chips in front of him.

Mike and Bimbo Hickey, the thick-waisted slugger of Adams's gang, were playing; so were Bige Greenwood, the lanky cook of the *Polly Jones,* and Parson Tupper, so called because he looked respectable and supplied a good part of the heavy thinking for the others.

THERE was a moment during which Nip Mobrey found the taste of life

bitter in his mouth, stricken by the thought that it was Twofoot whom Dolly had gone to meet. Then the pad of a footstep on the deck brought him upright, and he found himself staring into the face of the man he thought was somewhere else.

Adams stood outlined in the light from the companionway, tall and broad of shoulder and handsome. The small mustache that he affected curled upward, with a gleam of white teeth, as he reached for Nip.

In that split second Mobrey realized that this was no time for battle, and he did the unexpected in order to avoid it. Instead of closing in, or trying to avoid the grasp of Adams and counter, he vaulted lightly to the top of the deckhouse.

With one movement he landed there, like a cat ready to spring, and with the next he straightened and kicked Twofoot under the chin.

Even before Twofoot Adams had stopped reeling backward across the deck Mobrey was away, up the landing and into the undergrowth. Without lights he backed his car into the rutty road.

A muffled shout from the sloop, then the staccato of pistol shots. He felt a thud against the chassis, but the next moment he was popping around a turn of the road.

Whatever they might think back there on the *Polly Jones* mattered nothing to Mobrey now. They might even think he was a spy for all he cared.

His concern was to make sure that Dolly had gone to Snub Kirby, and then tomorrow they would be married and everything would be fine. Nip's wavering faith began to grow steady again. He put his foot down on the gas and leaped along toward Poke o' Moonshine.

CHAPTER V

A VAGUE UNEASINESS

DAY was just breaking when Nip edged off the road a short distance from Kirby's house and stopped to smoke and wait for full daylight. There was no use getting a man out of bed twice in one night, and probably Dolly had already done it once.

The night had calmed Mobrey to a certain extent. He settled back under a screen of overhanging branches and drew on his pipe.

The rattle of wagon wheels and the beat of hoofs brought him up in his seat. A team was coming at a brisk trot, and unless his ears played him false it belonged to Dolly Blaw. With a sudden reluctance to be seen he slid over in the seat, farther into the shelter of the branchs.

The horses appeared, with the wagon clattering behind them and Dolly sitting straight as an arrow on the seat. She was bareheaded now, with her face lifted to the morning breeze and her black curls tossing.

One flicker of the eyes toward that skeleton car parked in the bushes, then the wagon had rattled past. Mobrey did not know whether she had glimpsed him, whether she had recognized his car. From the casual glance she had thrown his way it was impossible to guess what had been in her mind as she went steadily on.

Nip relaxed, although there was the shadow of a vague uneasiness upon him. She had gone to see Snub, as she had said; Mobrey glowed now with the warmth of his confidence in her.

What a fool jealousy had made of him! Just because Dolly leaned over backward in her straightforwardness!

He by no means felt driven to go on to Kirby's house, but he might as

well, now that he was here. The car popped and sputtered back onto the road.

CHAPTER VI

A WINDOW BANGS

SNUB KIRBY was pumping water in the back yard, with his straw-colored hair tousled over a before-breakfast expression. He continued to pump water as Mobrey banged up beside him and came to a halt. The engine ceased to throb. Nip grinned for the first time since the day before.

"Hello!" he said. "You look as though you'd been out last night!"

"Don't yell!" grunted Kirby. "I ain't been out anywhere any time. That engine makes an awful racket. I bet it woke up Corinne!"

"What's that?" gasped Nip.

"I bet you woke up Corinne again! Where's your ears? She's bad enough after Dolly Blaw coming here in the middle of the night!"

"Corinne?" murmured Nip feebly. "Not Corinne Gebo?"

"Name's Kirby now!" snapped Snub. "I got married."

"Well—I'm knocked cold!"

"It was kind of a surprise to me, too," admitted Kirby. "Corinne told me one day over to her house either to get out and stay out or get out and come back with a marriage license. Her pa was fooling with his shotgun. So I did—I got the license. A feller might as well get married one time as another. It's got to come some time."

"I knew you and Corinne was going around together," said Mobrey. "Say, Snub, I want to ask you something. About Dolly's coming here. She and I figure on getting married, and yesterday she said she had to see you first."

"I know all about what you're going to say!" Snub Kirby raised a solemn hand.

"It's all true. I kind of proposed to Dolly once, and she said it might get so bad at home she'd even marry me to get away. Then she got sore because I didn't believe something she told me one time.

"I been trying to explain to Corinne that Dolly's coming up here didn't mean nothing. Just her way of doing things."

"That's what I thought," said Nip, and he almost believed himself. "You and Corinne want to come and see us get married this afternoon?"

"YOU ain't going to get married this afternoon—not to Dolly!"

"How's that?" demanded Mobrey.

"Not now nor any other time to Dolly Blaw! You followed her to find out if she was telling the truth. That girl is smart, and she'll know it. I bet she won't never speak to you again.

"I queered myself a good deal the same way. Watching to see where she went one day, after she'd told me about it."

"Dolly wouldn't stay mad!" protested Nip; but it was a feeble protest. He knew now the source of that vague uneasiness which had shadowed him as Dolly drove past.

He remembered what she had said yesterday; that if he did not have faith in her she would not trust him. Almost he prayed that she had not recognized his car.

"She's an awful good hand at staying mad!" Snub sat down upon the well curb. "You and me was buddies, Nip. I wish I could do something."

"I'm going back and I'm going to do something!" said Mobrey. "Twofoot Adams is after her, and Severe's working with Twofoot! That gang wouldn't stop at murder!"

AN upstairs window raised noisily and a bright head appeared, magnificently flaming in the sunrise. Corinne certainly was a handsome woman, even though she gazed down upon the two men with a frown creasing her milk-white forehead. Nip raised a hand to his hat.

"How-do, Corinne!" he said politely.

"Snub!" said Mrs. Kirby. "Pry yourself off that well curb and build a fire and put the kettle on, or I'll come down and see that you do! They's been enough going on here for one day!"

"All right, Corinne!" Kirby leaped to his feet. "Say, can I go fishing today with Nip?"

"No!" The window closed with a bang that rattled the glass. Silence, through which Snub Kirby took his heavy-footed way toward the kitchen door.

CHAPTER VII

SEVERE LAUGHS

NIP drove slowly away from the house of his friend, but when his patched tires took the highway he let his engine do all it would to put behind the miles between him and Dolly Blaw. It was close at noon, after a tortured journey of blowouts and worry and remorse, when he bumped into the yard of Severe Blaw and saw Dolly standing in the barn door with a pitchfork in her hands.

She had been feeding the horses evidently, and had come out at the sound of his car. Nip leaped to the ground.

"Dolly!" he cried, and became motionless.

She gave him the same stare she might have used on an unprepossessing stranger. Her eyes were hard and steady; white lips alone showed that she was suffering.

"What do you want here?" she asked in a low voice.

"You! Dolly, listen to me!"

"You don't trust me," she said. "I'm through!"

The slender, straight shoulders turned upon him; Dolly vanished into the dimness of the barn. Frantic, choking with words, Mobrey took a step to follow her.

A voice from behind stopped him.

"Hey, you!"

Nip spun around and found Severe Blaw covering him with a double-barreled shotgun. The old man was standing too far away to permit Mobrey to rush him, but near enough for a charge of shot to make a hole in a man as big as a hat; and it would look as though he were pretty well within his rights in shooting a man who annoyed his daughter in her own home.

Nip climbed slowly into the driver's seat. As he went away he heard a cackle of laughter from Severe.

CHAPTER VIII

YAWNS HELP A BUDDY

AT about the time when Nip Mobrey was retreating before a shotgun, and touching bottom spiritually, Snub Kirby was meditating upon various means of achieving absence without leave.

A man had to stand by a buddy, and something within whispered that Nip had headed straight for trouble when he went away in that tin-can automobile of his. Snub knew Dolly Blaw pretty well; not as well as he knew Corinne, but well enough.

Of course, he could put Corinne down cellar and set a rock on the hatchway doors. That is, he told himself that he was able to do it, but that he would not think of treating a

woman that way. Short of that there did not seem to be anything to do but wait for darkness and sleep.

So far he had been foiled in every attempt to leave the house. His wife appeared to be all around the place at once, and never satisfied unless his shoulders were humped over the bucksaw.

Snub had always been a resourceful man, with an eye for opportunity, but the day passed and no chance came to leave the woodpile. Therefore, it was with tremendous satisfaction that he saw Corinne begin to nod soon after she had finished the supper dishes; she had taken her mad out by cleaning half the house that day and sleep was taking hold of her like a drug.

Kirby yawned encouragement, and not long after dark they were both gently snoring, with noses pointed toward the ceiling of their bedroom.

WHEN there was no longer any doubt that Corinne was dead to the world for a matter of eight or nine hours, Snub slid gently out of bed and sneaked barefooted out of the room, with a handful of clothing and a thumping heart.

He stopped only to take his rifle; he even dressed in the woods where he felt safe and free. For a moment, as he took his rifle in the crook of his arm and started jauntily down the road, he experienced all the thrill of his pre-marital adventures.

Upon the kitchen door of the nearest neighbor who owned a car that would run Snub Kirby pounded with importunate knuckles. The man of the house put his head out cautiously and Snub took a grip upon his shirt front.

Things were going to move from now on; Snub Kirby was himself again.

"I gotta go down to Severe Blaw's place near the lake shore just as soon as I can get there," said Kirby. "You take me and I'll give you the first fox skin I get this fall. If you don't——"

"Honest, Snub," said the car owner, "my gas is low, and——"

"I got to help out a buddy that's in trouble, or going to be," said Snub coldly. "You drive me and I'll give you a fox skin. If you don't——"

For the second time the voice of Snub Kirby died away lugubriously on the same words. The neighbor changed his mind.

"Sure, I'll go, he muttered. "Right off!"

CHAPTER IX

THE CLOTHESLINE CAPTIVE

JASON MOBREY was somewhat like those small mountain streams which tumble along joyously year after year, and only once in a blue moon indulge in a freshet that rips things up for many a devastated mile.

At twilight of the day on which Severe Blaw had driven him away like a whipped dog he had become a new, a strange man; a being quite different to that amiable Nip Mobrey who had not been able to feel any real animosity, even toward Twofoot Adams.

Nip was mad; he was all through trying to plead with Dolly. Loss, humiliation and a feeling that he himself had failed had seared him through the long afternoon.

It was inevitable that he should either break or be roused to a fighting rage. And Nip was not a man to break.

When darkness came, as nearly complete as the stars would permit, Mobrey was standing in the crowded undergrowth near the Blaw house. He had been watching for a long

time, and he knew that only Severe and Dolly were there.

Nip's car waited on the main road, with a full gas tank. In his pocket were a couple of newly purchased lengths of clothesline.

As soon as he judged that it would grow no darker Nip walked boldly up to the lighted kitchen and, without knocking, flung open the door.

Up from a chair by the polished cook stove sprang Severe, his glance flashing to the rack where his guns hung. Dolly turned from the sink, a dish that she was wiping poised in her hand.

Nip moved as a wind-blown leaf drifts along the ground. He timed and placed a somewhat restrained blow upon the chin of Severe Blaw before the old man could take a second step toward his weapons. Blaw sat down, dazed.

Mobrey moved his head slightly to avoid the plate that had been in the hand of Dolly. It skimmed his ear and smashed against the wall.

Her fist struck him between the eyes with surprising force; and the next instant he was holding both her wrists with one hand while he reached for the clothesline with the other.

ALL this without a word having been spoken. Then, as the line tightened about Dolly's wrists, she turned blazing eyes upon Mobrey.

"What are you going to do?" she panted.

"You and I are in love with each other," he told her grimly, as he sat her down in a chair and lashed her ankles together. "So we're going to get married!"

"Never!"

Severe Blaw was reviving. Mobrey devoted all of one clothesline to tying him upon a stout bench in such a way that he was helpless except for his tongue.

"Twofoot'll bust you wide open for this!" he snarled, as Nip swung Dolly up in his arms and started for the door.

"He'll have a chance to try it after we're married!" barked Nip. "And I hope he does!"

MOBREY strode out into the night with the curses of Severe following him. Of necessity Dolly's head lay upon his shoulder; her breathing was against his cheek.

He jog-trotted toward the road with his silent burden, set her on the seat of his car and climbed in beside her. The lights streamed against the background of forest, and the engine began to thump.

"You think you can get away with this?" she demanded, as they swung along the highway.

"I know I can! I've got a tent and some camping stuff lashed on the back end of the car. We're going back into the mountains where even the hedgehogs get lonesome. We're going to stay there until you get some sense!

"You don't need to worry—you won't be hurt. But I'm all set to wait till I grow whiskers a foot long! I've had enough of this high and mighty business from you! We're going to get married!"

"I'll show you whether we will or not!" in a voice hard as iron.

To this Mobrey made no reply; the Dolly Blaw he had held in his arms yesterday was obscured by a cloud of anger now.

He could not blame her; the lack of faith had been his. But not on that account was he going to let her get away from him.

It was only the unyielding iron in her that roused his anger; yet when he remembered her life he wondered not at her hardness but that her eyes

could soften and glow with love as they had for him the day before.

The sketch of a car tilted and leaped, and remained right side up only because of the driving of its master. They drew near to the lane that ran down to the cove of the *Polly Jones*.

Mobrey planned to strike back into the mountains a little farther on and he knew that if he could get out of the neighborhood without being seen by any of the Adams gang they would be utterly at a loss as to what direction to take when they tried to follow him.

Hence when he saw, from a distance, a bobbing lantern coming up the lane he increased his speed to the limit. He wanted to pass the lane before whoever was coming could meet him and recognize Nip Mobrey. The car slithered and skidded, bobbed out of a rut and leaped into the air as it went over a slightly raised sluice.

CHAPTER X

DOLLY UPSETS PLANS

MOBREY had not fully reckoned with the girl beside him. In spite of all he knew of her reckless courage, what she did now took him so completely by surprise that he was helpless for the fraction of a second in which he might have saved them.

Dolly lurched against him, set her strong teeth into the sleeve of his coat, and with a straightening of her bound body forced the wheel over.

Nip felt the sickening twist beneath him. Too late he threw his weight against that attack. They were ditched, diving out of the car.

Mobrey took a crack on the top of his head, heard the glass of the windshield crash, and sank to rest in a tangle of leaves and yielding bushes.

He did not quite lose consciousness, but there were many seconds during which he lay looking up at the stars, filled with wonder at what had happened. Dolly! He tried to spring up and find her, panicky with the fear that she was hurt.

His legs and arms did not work after their accustomed fashion. It was a great effort to get to his hands and knees. He rested that way, with his face brushed by leaves.

A hum of voices, broken by excited exclamations, drew near. Nip realized, dimly, the presence of danger, and could do nothing about it.

Then through the night came a ringing cry, and Mobrey was closer to despair than he had been since he had walked away from the shotgun in the hands of Severe Blaw.

"It's Dolly Blaw!" shouted the voice of Twofoot Adams. "And Mobrey's car!"

MOBREY was jerked to his feet, with a chorus of yelps and curses; the lantern was held in his face. He saw the white-toothed grin of Adams; then he was being hustled, staggering, down the lane.

In the dancing light he saw Dolly limp on ahead of him, half supported by Twofoot. At least she was not seriously hurt.

They went on board the *Polly Jones*, while Adams drew from Dolly, in fragments, the story of what had happened. The laughter of Twofoot roared to the stars and he ordered Parson Tupper to go and set Severe free.

An unknown foot kicked Nip down the companionway. He sprawled upon a locker in the cabin. The others clattered down after him.

The lamp was turned up and as Mobrey's glance swept the faces of the men a nameless foreboding chilled him. He had heard of what some-

times happened to smuggled Chinamen when the officers pressed too closely.

Dolly was patting her handkerchief to a little cut on her forehead. Otherwise she seemed all right now, and she looked through and beyond Nip when he tried to get her eye.

The smile of Twofoot Adams was less pleasant than Mobrey had ever seen it. He and the Hickey boys and Bige Greenwood scattered themselves about the small cabin. Nip tried to pull himself together.

"NOW what do you think?"

The voice of Dolly suddenly rang through the momest of silence that followed the descent into the cabin.

She was talking to Mobrey; yes, her defiant eyes met his now. He drew a deep breath, and told the truth.

"I think you're—all right, Dolly! You can't fool me just because you're mad!"

Did a flicker of change sweep across her face? There was no time for Nip Mobrey to speculate upon that. The smile of Adams vanished and his face became as cold and bleak and sinister as the lake on a gale-swept November day.

With his eyes he sent a message to Mike Hickey and to Bimbo; he glanced up the companionway. They read that message and nodded almost imperceptibly, their flat faces expressionless.

To Mobrey it was as though a current of cold air had swept the cabin. He watched the thick fingers of Bimbo Hickey as they curled over the edge of the locker upon which the man sat. Those fingers were ready for his throat.

"Mobrey," said Twofoot, "I guess we better take you for a little trip."

"You'll take him home!" Dolly flared, turned toward Adams.

For the first time since he had known her Nip saw a trace of fear in her level glance. Perhaps she, also, had felt the menace that was closing like a fog around him.

"Home!" Twofoot rolled his eyes upward in mock solemnity. The inference was plain. The Hickey boys stirred with a common impulse.

Dolly leaped to her feet, breathing through parted lips.

"Twofoot," she cried, "what are you thinking—planning?"

Twofoot Adams regarded her with an unwinking gaze; he was filled with the consciousness of power.

"I'm planning to take you up the lake with me tonight," he said, "into Canada. Nice trip, Dolly!"

"You didn't mean, a minute ago, that you were going to take Nip along!"

Adams laughed. Bige Greenwood slapped his knee, and even the impassive faces of the Hickey boys cracked to the humor of that remark.

"Another kind of a trip, Dolly!" exclaimed Greenwood, shaking through all his extravagant and muscular length.

Her glance swept from Twofoot to Mobrey and back again. Now she had the air of a cornered wild thing; and at her next words the heart of Nip filled with tenderness and gratitude.

"I won't go unless you turn Nip Mobrey loose!" she said, in a low voice. Her cheeks burned; her fingers curled into fists.

"Wake up, Dolly!" chuckled Adams. "I've got you and Mobrey right where I want you tonight! Neither one of you has anything to say about what happens. You go one way, and he goes another! Quick as Parson Tupper gets back with your old man the *Polly Jones* starts up the lake!"

She stood frozen by the realization that her offer to sacrifice herself for

Nip had done no good; that no effort of hers could save him.

Her stricken eyes turned to Mobrey; in them he read a plea for forgiveness, and a terror that was not because of her own danger.

CHAPTER XI

REVERSE ENGLISH

THROUGH these past moments Nip Mobrey had been recovering from the physical shock of the crash; more potent than anything else to restore him had been the sudden change in Dolly when she realized what she had done, and that he believed in her in spite of her fierce revolt.

He had been thinking desperately. They were four to one, and there was nothing in sight which he could use as a weapon. The table in the center of the cabin was bolted to the floor solidly.

Nip slouched on his seat; he let his head droop forward as though it were bowed by pain and weakness. A suppressed cry came from Dolly. At a signal from Adams the four men moved toward him, the Hickey boys around one side of the table and Bige and Twofoot around the other. The arm of Mike swept out and struck Dolly back against the wall.

They thought they had little to do, and yet they came with a certain amount of caution—for even a half-stunned Nip Mobrey might be dangerous. Bimbo Hickey had actually gathered himself to pounce when Nip left his locker; he sprang, put a hand flat upon the table, and vaulted. He slid the length of the time-polished boards and landed at the foot of the companionway before the others could move.

Now, in an instant, the situation was reversed. Mobrey's four captors were in the cabin and he, for the moment at least, held the doorway.

But that Dolly was there with them he would have sprung up to the deck and made them prisoners on their own boat. He had to get her out, or give her a chance to get out.

That was easier thought of than done. She was swept back like a chip as the men plunged to attack Mobrey, coming from both sides at once. He knew that he must fight as he had never fought before, and he summoned all the reserves of speed and power that were in him.

Nip crouched and struck low. His right fist landed and Mike Hickey doubled up, his face turning a sickly yellow as he sank to the deck. Left at close range—and a dull snap as Greenwood slumped over the table, clutching at his ribs.

Bimbo Hickey hesitated. Twofoot turned and dashed around the other end of the table. The next instant he had jerked Dolly to her feet from the locker where she had fallen when Mike Hickey had struck her.

His thick wrist went across her throat as he held her in front of him. She gave a cry that broke in a cough, and fought unavailingly. Her chin lifted and dark color flooded her face as she struggled for breath.

"Tie him up, Bimbo!" commanded Twofoot, hoarsely. "If he makes a move I'll break the girl's damn neck!"

Either way lay defeat. He could see Dolly killed before he could get past Hickey to prevent it or else himself given up to death. Dolly Blaw lurched in the arms of Adams and with a mighty effort hurled one rasping word across the cabin.

"Fight!"

But Nip Mobrey could not while torture stared out of her eyes, while her lips twisted and curled with pain. Bimbo Hickey snatched the belt from his own waist and stepped forward. Mobrey lifted his hands, and in another moment would have given his wrists over to the enemy.

CHAPTER XII

ANOTHER GOOD MAN

MOBREY saw a sudden blankness of terror strike the face of Twofoot Adams, and the body of Twofoot jerked and became rigid as though it had met the shock of lightning. His arm dropped from the throat of Dolly; she staggered forward and leaned upon the table. Then Nip saw what had caused the swift change.

Through an open porthole behind Adams the black barrel of a rifle had been thrust. The muzzle pressed against the back of his neck and out of the darkness a voice growled.

"Stick them dirty paws of your'n up in the air, and keep 'em up!"

All this in a few crackling seconds; at the change in the face of Mobrey Bimbo Hickey drew back and threw a glance behind. The rugged line of his jaw presented itself for the fist of Nip, and Hickey dropped without a groan beside his still unconscious brother. On the other side of the cabin Greenwood was curled up like a sick dog.

Nip grabbed the belt that had fallen from the hands of Bimbo and strapped the hands of Twofoot Adams safely behind his back. Time enough later on to find out who held that friendly rifle.

Mobrey jammed his prisoner into a corner and turned to Dolly. Gasping, trying to laugh through unwelcome tears, she found one of his hands with both her own.

"I didn't mean—mean—all this!" she said.

NIP kissed her; it was the only answer he could think of. And he would have kissed her again but from the companionway came a half-mournful greeting in a voice that he knew well.

"'Nother good man gone wrong."

Snub Kirby came down into the cabin with a rifle in the crook of his arm.

"Dolly, I got your pa locked in his own cellar, along with Parson Tupper. Had to do it, but I hope they ain't going to be no hard feelings."

"You can nail their hides up on the side of the barn, for all I care!" cried Dolly, with a flash of her old spirit. "Snub, you've—you've saved us!"

"Mebbe," admitted Kirby.

He set his rifle down and glanced around the cabin.

"I got to worrying about Nip. A feller ought to stick to his buddy. And then I kind of wanted to see him put the halter on, if he was going to.

"So as soon as Corinne begun to snore good tonight I took my rifle and snuck out. And here I be! A rifle's a handy thing to have along, Nip!"

"I'm glad!" exclaimed Dolly Blaw, with shining eyes. "Now it's turned out this way I'm glad Nip didn't have a gun! We've had a chance to—to show each other!"

"You've got your hands full, Nip." said Snub, with great pessimism. "When I got to the Blaw place looking for you and found Severe and Tupper getting ready to start out for your funeral, I knowed the night was going to end hard!"

"Not for me, Snub!" exclaimed Nip, as he drew Dolly closer. "But maybe it will for you, when you get home!"

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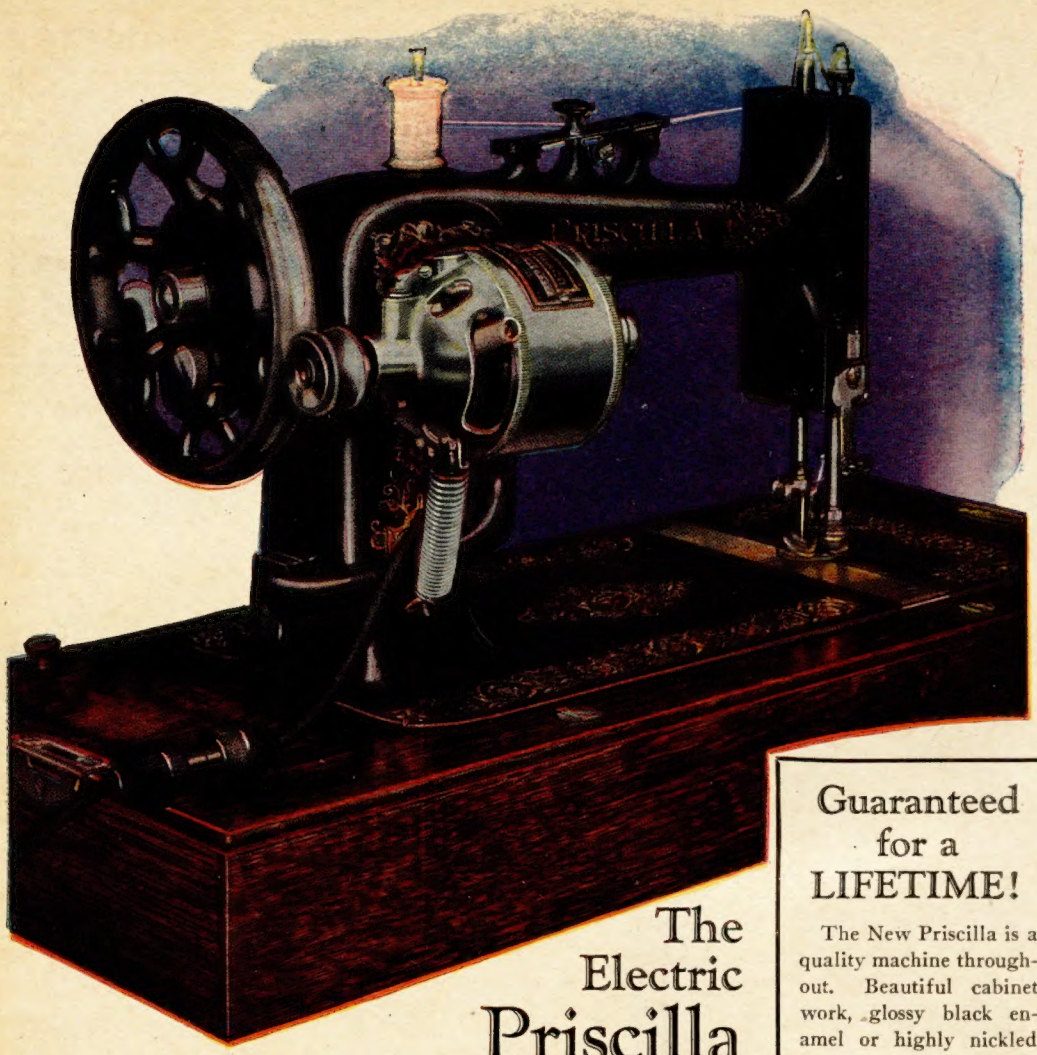

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